

S E R M O N S

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

BY THE REVEREND

Rev. BENJAMIN THOMAS, *K*

OF MALMSBURY.

V O L. I.

L O N D O N:

Printed for the Author's Widow; and sold by Mr. DILLY,
in the Poultry; Mr. BUCKLAND, Pater-noster-Row,
and Mr KEARSLEY, Fleet-Street.

MDCCLXXXII^B

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S E R M O N I.

J A M E S I. 27.

Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; and to keep one's self unspotted from the world.

“ALL scripture, saith the Apostle, is given by the inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Does any Christian dispute it? — do we not all regard revelation as the great source of moral light that dispelled the gloom of ignorance and superstition, and exposed to the world the

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hidden

hidden mysteries of iniquity; that silenced the lying oracles of the Heathen; and redeemed mankind from the tyranny of subtil priests?

We acknowledge the Scriptures were given for the direction of our conduct, to rectify our moral errors, to teach just sentiments of God and religion, and to lead us by the hand to virtue, to glory, and to happiness. Must it not then be of the highest consequence to study this treasure of divine inestimable knowledge; to improve by its doctrines, and to examine the real import and extent of every precept? Is it not doing justice to those sacred writings? And will not the trouble of every impartial inquirer be amply rewarded? Is it not of the greatest importance to have a clear view of the holy religion by which, as we acknowledge, our conduct ought to be regulated?

Mankind, when left to the mere guidance of the light of nature, grew foolish in their conceptions of God. Their sentiments of him were formed according to their own corrupt imaginations; they ascribed to him such properties and dispositions, as even a virtuous man would

would be ashamed of: instead of conceiving of him, as our holy and reasonable religion bids us, a wise, a good, pure, holy, and merciful being; they made him weak, capricious, impure, and cruel. Their worship of him must correspond with these opinions: the most scandalous scenes were exhibited in honour of him; riot and debauchery were sanctified at certain seasons; and even human sacrifices were thought to appease his frowns and satisfy his justice: superstition swelled the number of ritual observations to an enormous size. Thus, indeed, among the Jews, as well as the Gentiles, religion was almost entirely lost; at least it was very near being entirely hid by the gay ornaments they put about it. And this is too much the case among many Christians; while a solemn grave appearance, a pharisaical countenance, a regular discharge of positive institutions, &c. are thought to commute for sin: at least it is imagined that religion consists in these formalities; and that men are secure of heaven, when destitute of that enlivening principle, which alone can add dignity to man, and

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entitle him to the favour and friendship of the Supreme Being.

While superstition on the one hand enervates and disgraces religion, and makes the worship of God a mere external thing; and an open barefaced impiety on the other, dissipates the powers of the mind, and every serious thought: while a cool indifference possesses so many Christian professors, and renders them careless about the important affairs of piety and virtue—it is of the greatest consequence to guard mankind against these hurtful extremes. And how is it to be done? by bringing truth to an open point of view; by collecting the just sense of revelation; by shewing in what religion consists; and producing the motives and sanctions therein contained in its support; by laying open the nature and attributes of God as far as we are acquainted, with, or can have any ideas of them; and by shewing, from the close connexion subsisting between him and his creatures, the duty they owe him.

I shall therefore, in order to support the dignity of our holy religion, and to fill our minds
with

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with real love and esteem for it, endeavour to explain it, from the declarations of scripture, from what we know of the nature of God, and from its necessity in the situation and condition of man.

For, as man is a reasonable creature, and endued with a sense of beauty and propriety in conduct; every object that is rational, decent, and just, must deserve his attention and particular regard. Religion, then, in its own nature, is a wise, a decent, and profitable thing; it is founded in the eternal reason and fitness of things. Religion enlarges every power of the soul; it adds beauty to the conduct of an intelligent being; and speaks peace to the mind: while irreligion and impiety debase the most shining qualifications, and fill the man with horror and confusion: and while enthusiasm and superstition, bring the most reasonable plan of devotion to contempt. In order, therefore, to explain the words of my text, as I have proposed, I shall endeavour to shew what religion is, in its own nature and full extent; and at the same time strip it of those trappings of ignorance and superstition which

wicked men have, in a manner, blended with it. Secondly, that there is an intrinsic worth and native beauty in religion: and, lastly, enforce the doctrine in the text, suitable to the great importance of the subject.

Religion is not a mere matter of form, nor an external mode; but an internal principle, founded in reason arising from the nature of man, the circumstances in which he is placed, and the relation he stands in to the Deity. It consists in just and honourable sentiments of God; in pious endeavours to answer the great purpose of our being, and of his providence; in love, reverence, and obedience unto him. And it is a very considerable part of religion, to express our love and regard unto him, by all suitable acts of worship, performed, as the royal prophet advises, in the beauty of holiness, in a reverend and decent manner; and as the duties of religion are the same with the great law of nature, the moral law; benevolence to men, justice, mercy, and truth, and the careful discharge of all relative duties, must be a very important part of it. This is religion,

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gion, in the right and extensive meaning of it; though we often make use of the word to express our speculative opinions, our forms of worship, or to distinguish any particular denomination of people. Thus we say the Mahometan, the Popish, and the Protestant religion; but true religion is the same in every nation and clime, and under every dispensation; and forms and ceremonies, by no means constitute a part of it. Thus the religion of the Jews was in reality the same with Christianity. Love, and obedience to God; a ready submission to all his dispensations; an inviolable conscientious regard to justice, benevolence, truth, and mercy, were the noble principles that actuated every good man and constituted his religion. And, whenever these principles prevail, whether among Jews or Gentiles, Mahometans, or Christians, it is then alone men can be properly stiled truly religious. I have the Apostle's authority to confirm my assertion. "Pure religion, saith he, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to

keep himself unspotted from the world. "Whatever other pretensions he may have, they are all vain and useless. A man may seem to be religious, he may assume a sacred cloak, but without these qualifications, he only deceiveth his own heart; he cannot escape the all-pervading eye of the great God, who seeth into the closest recesses of his soul, and esteems an action so far only, as it flows from pious, benevolent, and honourable principles: it is that conduct alone, that approves itself to our reason and conscience, that can recommend us to our Maker: those actions, that proceed from our dependence on God, from a sense of the rectitude of his commands, and his generous, kind concern for our happiness; that are for ever directed by justice, compassion, and disinterested goodness to all mankind: this is pure religion: this entitles us to the character of the children of God. To assist the weak and the indigent, to administer relief to the distressed, to extend the arm of friendship and compassion to such as stand in need of our assistance: a soul, unclogged by super-

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superstition, and a stranger to partiality and avarice ; a mind untinged with vice and impiety, that guards against the fallies of passions, and the allurements of fashionable iniquity, that holds fast its integrity, uncorrupt, and undefiled ; that faithfully discharges his duty to God and man, as a social and dependent being. Whatever noise may be made about positive duties, and external ordinances, when they are put in the scale against these duties of eternal obligation, they are nothing. It is true that such ritual institutions as are found in the New Testament, have all a manifest tendency to advance the interest of these important virtues in our hearts ; they therefore become a part of the religion of Christians, and are indispensably binding upon every professor : but what shall we say of human institutions, and the traditions of men, though they had the sanction of antiquity, and a cloud of fathers and schoolmen bore witness unto them ? they can never bind the conscience, nor advance the interest of real religion ; they must be regarded by every sensible and impartial man, as base impositions

impositions; especially, when they are made terms of communion, as is too much the case. The Christian religion surely consists not in bowing at the name of Jesus, in adoring towards the east, in subscribing a set of confused articles of faith, of human invention, nor in kneeling at the sacrament, nor in the cross at baptism. In what then does religion consist? is it in a regular attendance on public worship? in such a case it shews a good disposition; but unless the person is profited thereby in his sentiments, in his temper, and conduct, this will avail him nothing. Many in the great day will address the sovereign judge, *have we not called thee Lord? hast thou not preached in our streets? have we not cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles? have we not been the foremost in thy church? have we not by our zeal for thy glory, been distinguished from others?* Then will he answer them, ye surely deceived mankind, who judged of your hearts by your outward appearance. But did ye not indulge pride, malice, covetousness, and other vices in your minds? These were not
hidden

hidden from my eyes. You make my name as a mantle to cover your vices. *Depart from me ye workers of iniquity.* But he, whose religion is rational and sincere, and founded upon the principles of Christianity; that pays his morning and evening homage of praise, gratitude, and devotion to the Supreme Being; that observes the works of nature and grace; submits with resignation to all the ways of heaven; that feels the miseries of mankind, and commiserates the distressed; that preserves sacred the dictates of reason and religion: he is the good, and the sincerely religious Christian. How decent, how amiable, and truly exalted is his conduct, who forms his life according to this noble pattern! Wisdom guides his feet; justice, piety, and benevolence animate all his actions; an unaffected simplicity adorns his whole deportment; cheerfulness shines in his countenance; and a virtuous peace brightens his soul. Adversity, without rendering him wretched, only calms every tumultuous passion, and gives every spring of the soul its proper strength. He regards it
sometimes

sometimes as a relaxation which Providence kindly grants mankind, from the noise and hurry of life, in order to give reflection its proper scope: for we then perceive every object in its own just colour; divested of those false lights, in which our misinformed judgments or irregular fancies had decorated them. Here, free from the bustle of the world, to be at leisure to take a view of our former actions, and their various consequences; to meditate on the Divine Nature and perfections, and with rapture to anticipate the joys to come: this is a privilege! in prosperity, he is more likely to deal out his bread to the poor and the indigent; for, having felt distress, he regards it as a season, in which he ought to imitate his Maker in diffusing relief, and happiness to all around him. Who admires not such a character, in which are exemplified all those virtues that can endear one to God or man; in which a ready submission to the designs of Providence, a generous regard to the welfare of his fellow creatures are illustriously displayed; with a careful attention to the whole scope of his

his

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his duty, and the greatest concern to submit himself to the whole will of God. When he appears before his Maker, whether in public or private, love and reverence direct his conduct, and appear in his countenance. Of such a one, it may be justly said, that his religion is undefiled before God the Father.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N II.

L U K E II. 10, 11.

And the angel said unto them, fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

MANY disputes have been raised with regard to the precise time, and the day on which the Saviour of the world appeared. And the controversy has been handled with too much zeal and animosity; those, whose religion consists in the punctual observance of *days and meats*, have not failed in propagating
 absurd

absurd and ridiculous notions concerning it; assuring us, that they themselves have seen unusual phenomenæ, and supernatural appearances upon it, as if Heaven was interested in the dispute. But as to the day, or season of the year, we cannot possibly have any accurate account, since it was never observed among Christians till superstition, and the fopperies of Rome, began to spread their banners, about three hundred years after Christ. The institution itself was borrowed from the Heathen, and solemnized in the same manner. And even in our times, at this season of the year, the house of mirth is laid open, and scenes of luxury, intemperance, and festivity, witness our gratitude to Heaven for a Redeemer; but surely in a manner very unworthy and unbecoming: it being nothing unusual for hundreds on this day, to deny themselves the gratification of morning slumber, to repair early to places of public worship, to hymn their Maker's praise, while the rest of the day is spent in the haunts of extravagance and riot. Surely a heathen would scarcely believe, that the person they
thus

thus commemorated, bore such a character as Christ did, through the whole of his life; that the disciples of a person, who inculcated and exemplified the strictest rules of sobriety and virtue, would choose such an unaccountable method of doing honour to his name and doctrine: but I am persuaded, that such practices are esteemed by every person present, as entirely criminal and opposite to that holy religion, he propagated among reasonable and accountable beings. I cannot but regret, that such an occasion to adore the goodness and mercy of the Sovereign of the universe should be perverted, or rather prostituted to such customs.

I now return to the words of my text. And what I design principally is, to consider: First, the extraordinary circumstances that attended the birth of our Saviour: Secondly, the wretched condition the whole collective body of mankind were in, with regard to their morals and schemes of religion: And the invaluable advantages resulting to the world from the coming of Christ.

When

X When the human race had departed from the great end of its being, and degenerated into the grossest absurdities, both in principles and practice; when Heathen superstitions were enslaving humanity, and trampling the sacred dictates of conscience; and Jewish ceremonies were setting at nought the prescriptions of reason, and despising the ties of virtue and justice; it seemed fit to Infinite Wisdom to commit the restoration of the world to him, through whom it was made. But it cannot be imagined that such a distinguished event should take place without some very extraordinary circumstances to attend it; and to pass unnoticed without some awful attestations of the appearance of this glorious person among mankind. It will be readily granted, then, that the powers above would bear witness to so grateful, so interesting an era, that it should not fall out according to the common course of nature. — And so, in fact, it came to pass. — When the Saviour was introduced into the world, a company of celestial beings bore witness to it, in order to prepare the minds of the people for

the reception of so great and eminent a personage.

The persons to whom these ministers of God addressed themselves, were shepherds, who kept watch over their flocks by night; persons who could have no interest in the appearance of the Messiah, but in common with the rest of mankind. They could not possibly have any prospect of reaping benefit from an imposture, and therefore must be the less suspected of spreading falsehoods. To these the heavenly vision appeared; persons of honest, candid minds, who were willing to know, and be confirmed in the truth. As directed by the angel, they went to Bethlehem; and found every thing as they were told. And when they had seen it; when they found the persons described, and their circumstances, in every particular, answering the account given them; they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. They were not willing to conceal the truth; but they dispersed it among their neighbours, who, as it is recorded, wondered at those things that were told them by the

the shepherds. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for the things they had heard and seen. — Finding the situation of the Messiah to correspond so exactly with the description of the angel, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger, they did not in the least doubt the reality of what they had seen and heard, nor attribute it to the delusions of their imagination: they desired no farther evidence for their belief, but went and published these glad tidings — and on account of that honest simplicity which is ever pleasing to the Deity, they were honoured with the first commission to publish to the world the grateful news.

And it is to be observed, that the whole earth was in expectation of the appearance of some very great personage. The Jews impatiently waited for the coming of their promised Deliverer; and had already, in thought, vanquished all their enemies under his banner. — And the whole Gentile world had sanguine hopes that some great prophet was shortly to appear, who would reform mankind of their

vices, and constitute a more perfect scheme of religion. And indeed they seem to have more worthy conceptions of his commission than even the Jews themselves; for one of their greatest poets, who wrote in the days of Augustus Cæsar, just before the birth of the Messiah, speaks to this purpose: "The promised years are now approaching; justice and truth return; an heavenly offspring will restore the golden age. May the Powers above protect the newborn babe: and whatever footsteps of our antient crimes remain, for ever shall be banished," &c.

Some of the expressions that follow seem evidently to have been borrowed from Isaiah xi. 6-9; so that it is not very difficult to understand how the Gentile world had any notions of this kind. As the Jews had been carried captives, and dispersed almost over the whole earth, their writings were translated into the most popular and universal language; and afterward, their country being made a Roman province, they must have had a greater intimacy with the Gentiles. All these circumstances

cumstances contributed to circulate their doctrines; and they afford us the most reasonable account of their prevalence. — It was in consequence of this that the wise men from the East, probably from Chaldea, where the Israelites were long in captivity, came to Bethlehem, directed by a bright star, to pay their homage to the Lord of life. — No period in the whole Jewish history can be pointed out, in which the hopes of the people ran so very high, as at the introduction of the Deliverer into humanity. Every circumstance concurred to mark it for the designed era. The scepter was departed from Judah. The Jews were under the protection of the Gentiles; and we are told there were some looking for redemption. You might see anxiety printed in every face. Their ceremonies were rather become burdensome. Every day was expected to bring the welcome news. This must be gathered from the manner in which Herod received the wise men, when he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and the dreadful tragedy that he afterwards committed, when that remarkable pro-

phesy was fulfilled; "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not." This proved that he did not treat as an uncertain, superstitious report, the rumor that prevailed among the people, that the Messiah was born, and that he should sit upon the throne of his father David. It was in consequence of this prevailing expectation that some looked upon the fore-runner as the Messiah; while the prejudiced Pharisees found it difficult to reject him. They were, however, resolved to discountenance every claim that did not correspond with their notions of him, which they had drawn from their own corrupt ideas and passions, whatever violence they offered to their consciences; as is evident from their treatment of the Son of God, when they had all necessary and possible evidence that he was the promised Messiah.

I come to the second particular, to shew the wretched condition the whole world was in with respect to morals; how defective every scheme

scheme of religion was to bring about a general reformation, and the advantages resulting from the appearance of Christ. It must be acknowledged that our Saviour fixed upon the best period in the world for the propagation of his doctrines.

The Augustan æra was the most illustrious for arts and sciences, learning and knowledge. We are told that the wise men of Athens spent their time in nothing else but to say or hear some new thing, and consequently this was the most proper time to do justice to the excellence of the Christian religion, and to the character of its Author. The gospel is calculated for climes of reason, not for countries where ignorance and superstition bear sway. Among barbarians it would be soon loaded with a heap of absurdities, or perverted to every wicked purpose. Nay, it was reasonable that a religion, which challenged a divine original, and encouraged free enquiry, should make its appearance in an enlightened age, in order to remove all suspicions of fraud and collusion. Whenever any imposture was breached, we find

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lit either among barbarians, or propagated by the venerable arguments of rapine and devastation; like Mahomet, followed by a numerous army, with the sword in one hand and the Alcoran in the other, compelling men to embrace his religion or die. But Christ never attempted to raise a party, in order to extort belief; he chose a few illiterate, but honest, virtuous followers to propagate his religion, and addressed himself to men's reason and understanding. But notwithstanding the height to which knowledge was raised, the world in general was very corrupt. The Jews placed all their virtue and religion in the punctual observance of the traditions of the elders, and in every thing but that in which true religion consists. Among the Heathens, as well as among them, the lawfulness of revenge was maintained and esteemed as a mark of a great mind: and hence the reason why their wars were so frequent, and their civil discords so bloody. "The most execrable crimes were honoured with temples and altars; and prostitution, cruelty, and debauchery were the most acceptable

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acceptable worship they could pay. And what excesses might be expected, when the solemn sanctions of religion, joined with passion and custom to recommend them. And even the metropolis of the world, a little before the Christian æra, was distinguished for a licentiousness of manners unknown to the most corrupt of former ages. The religion of an oath was held in contempt, though the strongest bond of society. Suicide was the only practice that carried with it the least appearance of virtue. The little power which their religion had, at the best time, had lost its influence on the morals of men, and was made use of to serve the purpose of factions. Not to mention the horrid custom of human sacrifices, the unbounded luxury of the great, and the cruel servitude of the poor; the general perfidy that was introduced into the intercourses of the sexes, by the permission of polygamy, and the perpetual violation of conjugal faith. Certainly if any age or state of human nature called for the immediate interposition of Heaven, it was this; for they had proceeded from one impiety to

to another, till they seemed to have arrived at the last stage of corruption and degeneracy. But it is to be observed, that it was not for the want of a written law that vice prevailed so much in the Heathen world. The finest system of morality that the joint skill of men or angels could have formed, would have availed but little. They had excellent instructions in virtue, and every branch of moral goodness; but they proved insufficient to reform the world, or so much as to check the progress of vice and depravity. Their finest geniuses were employed in studying new species of guilt, and refining on immorality. They wanted a standard of truth and righteousness, attended with the most powerful motives and sanctions to the practice of virtue, that might discountenance error and superstition by superior discoveries, strengthen moral obligations, touch every spring of hope, and animate every principle of gratitude and benevolence in the human mind: — when, lo! the Saviour appeared, a light to Jews and Gentiles; and, agreeable to the prediction of Isaiah, to
remove

remove misery and guilt, and to establish peace, justice, and benevolence among mankind. —

Had Heaven left us to ourselves, it is not possible to conceive to what a wretched condition humanity must have inevitably degenerated. Every day produced new errors, fresh corruptions, and fresh gods. We cannot reflect without pain on the misery that such avowed principles of revenge, such open violations of every tie of nature, justice, and honour, would have involved us in: for every age improved on the other in superstition and sin; and nothing but a religion armed with so much power, with such awful sanctions and attestations of its divine original as Christianity, could have made its way, in plain opposition to all prejudice and passion, and produce so general a reformation among beings devoted to sin. What could have extirpated such enormous vices and inveterate passions, which antiquity and religion had made sacred? And to the influence of the Christian religion we may ascribe all the improvements of modern ages. A free enquiry is every where encouraged; those vices

vices which were destructive of human happiness are abolished ; or if there be any that remain, they cannot be attributed to the doctrines or precepts of Christianity ; for they all meet in one common end, in enforcing the laws of justice, moderation, virtue, benevolence, and sobriety. At the approach of the gospel, superstition, ignorance, tyranny of the priests, and all their baleful effects, die.

But it will be said, that divine worship never generated such an enormous system of absurdity and superstition, as among some that call themselves Christians at this day. I answer, that there is no blessing in life but may be abused ; no institution, however perfect, but may be perverted to wicked purposes by the cunning of wicked, sordid minds. Let any one of common honesty and candour examine the gospel, and say whether he can find any thing in it which tends to enslave the minds of mankind. No, it treats them as reasonable beings ; it commands us to prove all things, and to give our assent to nothing but what we find consistent with reason, and worthy of God.

We

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We may therefore conclude, that the gospel is
a favour of infinite worth, and deserves our
highest and warmest sentiments of gratitude,
&c. &c.

S E R M O N III.

SERMON

S E R M O N III.

II. CORINTHIANS, X. 5.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

THE whole conduct of Christ, and his apostles after him, when fairly and honestly examined, afford the most illustrious and pleasing proofs of the truth and excellence of the Christian institution. They demonstrate the most generous regard to mankind, and the greatest concern for their eternal happiness. — Above the influence of mean, worldly, and mercenary

merchary views; in spite of persecution, poverty, and contempt, they preserved the same upright and pious intentions of reforming their fellow-creatures, and establishing truth and virtue in their hearts: studious to redeem the world from the bondage of vice and superstition, and of dispossessing idolatry and iniquity, that carried the face of devotion, of their strong holds, they brought both the sentiments and conduct of mankind to the standard of truth and reason, "Casting down imaginations and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." A person unacquainted with the strength of prejudice would surely wonder whence it came to pass that Christianity made not a quicker progress, and how it obtained no greater footing in the world. He would think a religion, such as the gospel, which has evident truth and reason on its side, required no more than to be proposed, and then to be embraced by rational creatures. But we ought to consider, that established superstition is not so easily overturned

turned when folly is set on high places, when iniquity receives the sanction of public authority, and vice is interwoven with the policy of the land: in such cases a reformation is more to be desired than expected.— Vice, secure of her strong holds, marks the feeble attempts of the virtuous few. Whatever is fashionable the multitude is sure to adopt and support. A religion, divested of all worldly pomp and shew, which proposes naked, simple truth, and unbiaſſed reason for our guide; and virtue, integrity, and holiness as the end and aim of all our actions; is sure to meet many enemies in its way. And an institution, how absurd and ridiculous soever, if fancy has contributed its aid towards its formation; if vice is countenanced, and iniquity receives no check: add to this, if ceremony constitutes a part of it, and mystery and solemn shew hide its deformities; if a greater stress is laid on a devout countenance than a regular, virtuous life: for such an institution the best principles in the universe may be rejected and despised. This was the case with

Christianity;

Christianity, it was every where spoken against; in Judea the greatest truths were stiled blasphemy; and the gospel regarded as an impious attempt to subvert the old constitution. In Greece, the most learned and civilized country upon earth, the clearest reasons and the most virtuous maxims were despised, as folly and the offspring of ignorance. "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*," was, in effect, the popular cry at Jerusalem, at Rome, at Athens, as well as at Ephesus. Vice borrowed her ornaments from fancy and imagination; reason was laid aside, as too often is the case in matters of religion; and passion set up the standard of government. Both priests and kings were interested, and combined to keep on the general delusion; and mankind seemed happy under the yoke; chearfully contributed to support the old superstition, and to withstand the knowledge of God, as communicated by the gospel. What the apostle therefore means in the text, and which he acknowledges his duty to abolish and undermine, were those heathen institutions, which were all the creatures of fancy,

calculated to please the sense, and to sooth a corrupt and degenerate nature. But in order to understand him aright, it is necessary to examine into the state of religion in those days, both among Jews and Gentiles. The first had the oracles of God among them; a positive law for the direction of their conduct written by the finger of God himself. These they received, and acknowledged their divine origin. One might expect that *they* had kept clear of the bias of human inventions; that in *Judea* the God of Heaven was worshipped with purity of heart, and agreeable to his own directions; and that justice, truth, and benevolence were regarded in the commerce of life. But, with pain I say it, those people, whose conduct as well as religion ought to have been a model for all the nations of the earth, were become vain and foolish in their imaginations; the most empty forms and unmeaning ceremonies usurped the place of genuine religion; and extortion and cruelty, avarice and ambition, profaned the temple of the living God. The Gentiles, at the same time, subject only to the law

law of reason and the authority of conscience, were become inconceivably corrupt. Examine their sentiments of the Almighty, and every trace of reason seems to have been utterly absorbed in enthusiasm and superstition. Greece and Rome beheld their gods of gold, of brass, of wood, and stone; and stupidly adored them. Look into their temples, and behold in them scenes of pollution and unbounded lust, of cruelty and inhumanity. Fancy had called into being a thousand imaginary existencies, and credulous superstition erected churches for their worship. The hills and the vallies swarmed with little divinities; and every island and every river claimed its tutelar god. Thus were reasonable beings disgraced by idolatry. They proudly refused allegiance to Heaven; exalting themselves both against the knowledge and against the authority of God. Hence, then, we easily gather, what the apostle would have us understand by his expression, " *Casting down imaginations, &c. bringing into contempt those institutions both of Jews and Gentiles, which took their birth from a corrupt fancy,*

and were therefore inconsistent with truth, with reason and virtue; and in their stead, to establish the religion of Christ, which gives us the most exalted and most worthy sentiments of that Divine Being who gave us life, and would have us strive after virtue and holiness, in order to be capable of that refined and durable happiness, that real enjoyment, which he prepares for every righteous being. Confess, then, that the gospel is worthy of God, and worthy the esteem and chearful obedience of every reasonable creature. Acknowledge also, that vice disgraces men, and superstition renders them contemptible; and that honourable and just conceptions of God, a mind stored with truth, with generous and humane dispositions, alone give real worth and dignity.

But I think, in the prosecution of my subject, I may be allowed to apply the words of the text to present times, and insist that it is the duty of every Christian *to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

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It is an undoubted truth, that too many in the Christian Church entertain notions highly inconsistent with their profession, and even their characters as reasonable beings: but I blame no one for differing with me in disputable points, or in speculative religion: each individual has a native right of judging for himself; his own happiness is at stake; his own peace of mind; and his own salvation. Reason therefore tells us that no one ought to controul the conscience of another. But this I say, that at all times, reason, and the religion which we acknowledge to be divine, ought still to fix our principles, as well as direct our conduct; else fancy must become predominant, imagination dictate the articles of our faith; and the consequence will be, that folly and inconsistency will visibly appear in all our sentiments and actions.

Imagination ought by no means to enter into religion; it is cool, unbiaſſed reason ought to guide our enquiries after truth. Reason, uninfluenced by the authority or opinion of others, ought ever to be our monitor.

Fancy may give to deformity a kind of beauty; it throws false colouring over vice; and the most horrid actions are often rendered amiable in men's eyes.

How often have we followed a hero, or rather a tyrant, through scenes of horror and desolation with dreadful complacency, "and when we have seen him deluge the peaceful fields of industrious simplicity with blood, and leave them desolate to the widow and the orphan;" have we not too often concurred in his praise, pleased with these annals of blood and cruelty? Thus fancy gives to vice the disguise of virtue, and deceives the mind with false appearances. This then shews the necessity of being duly informed of the nature and consequence of every action, and the propriety of preserving reason uncorrupt and uninfluenced by fancy and imagination; or else we are ever liable to commit the most fatal errors in the conduct of life. But to this important purpose it is necessary we should have some standing rule for our direction in this world, where passion for ever wars against virtue; where tempta-

temptation, in a variety of pleasing forms, allures to the paths of unrighteousness, and fancy invites us to the vallies of delusion. The notices of natural reason alone can never be sufficient to direct us in every part of our conduct. Those lights, though useful and universal, are liable to be obscured by the blaze of passion, to be enfeebled by vice, or misled by error. The understanding may be made subservient to the Christian, and employed in the defence of what we wish, rather than what we ought to do. The force of truth may be overcome by habit; and, like the heathen statuary, we may fall down before an image of our own framing. It is essentially necessary, therefore, that we should have some certain rules of action, some plain directions laid down for our conduct, which can neither be perverted by sophistry, nor misconstrued by error. "Christ is the leading star by which we ought to direct our course, and is necessary to guard us" from error and delusion both in principle and practice. How reasonable is it, then, to

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listen

* Langhorne's Theodosius and Constantia.

listen to the directions of reason, and to the voice of God: how reasonable to submit to the authority of that which we know to be divine, and to reduce every thought to the subjection and obedience of Christ! A revelation of the will of God concerning us is undoubtedly one of the most valuable favours which can be conferred on mankind; and the revelation with which Christians are favoured is recommended to our regard by this great circumstance, that God, who at fundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; by whom also he made the worlds. Surely such an interposition as this in our favour ought to meet a most grateful reception, and to prevail with us to *cast down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and the obedience of Christ.*

The true and only acceptable way of expressing our gratitude is, by a cordial compliance with the design of the gospel, and by submitting

mitting to Jesus Christ, as our Saviour and Lord, with pure hearts, and a most stedfast resolution of doing his will in all things. And as the records of our holy religion are put into our hands; and we are taught to search the scriptures, and thence to learn the will of God concerning us; so we ought to apply the powers that God hath given us to that end, not receiving things upon trust and the authority of fallible men, where we can judge for ourselves, that our faith may not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God — and it ought to be our endeavour to advance in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but especially to add to our knowledge, faith, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity; for if these things be in us, and abound, they make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember that the end of our knowledge is practice; and that our whole success, with respect to the great purpose of religion, dependeth on sincere obedience: —
without

without this, our knowledge, even the most advanced degrees of it, will be so far from being at last profitable, that it will only aggravate our guilt, and make our condemnation so much the more dreadful. For that servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he who knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: for unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.

SER.

S E R M O N. IV.

L U K E VI. 48, 49.

Whofoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doth them, I will shew you to whom he is like; he is like a man building an house, who digged and went deep and laid the foundation on a rock, and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon the house and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock: but he that heareth and doth not, he is like a man that without a foundation built an house on the ground, against which the stream beat vehemently and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

HOWEVER different our sentiments, with regard to the speculative and undecided points in divinity, all must acknowledge that religion is founded in reason; that the gospel must

must be agreeable to the constitutions of the divine government, and the laws of truth and nature; that it is the gift of Supreme intelligence; and in consequence, that its doctrines and precepts are reasonable and true. And the sanctions that bind this law, are in themselves wise and fit to be executed. From such a persuasion alone, we can conclude this amiable institution to be divine. Having such a view, and such persuasion of the religion of Jesus, the cavils of infidelity, the scoffs of profaneness, or the sword of persecution can never destroy our belief. And from a close examination of the human mind, we may be assuredly convinced that no other than such an enlarged view of Christianity can prove a lasting principle of faith.

That the Christian religion is agreeable to the dictates of unperverted, reason; that it recommends itself to the mind before it is corrupted by vice, or depraved by folly, is a proposition that must be absolutely determined in the affirmative, before it is admitted by any thinking man. That it is agreeable to our ideas of divine wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth :

truth: that the rule of life it proposes, is agreeable to a reasonable and social being, must also be determined in its favour; before a man of sense, or a person that is careful of the propriety of his sentiments, can regard it as a divine and heavenly religion. I mention this, not to weaken and relax, but to confirm and establish our faith, by making it the offspring of rational persuasion and manly conviction; that truth may not witness for us, "that we have the zeal of God, but not according to knowledge: being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish our own righteousness, not (knowing nor) submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God." Rom. x. 2. 3.

Whence flow enthusiasm with her visionary attendants? whence superstition, with all her solemn trifles and religious buffooneries? whence bigotry, with all its unfociable effects, uncharitableness, slander, racks, and tortures? whence also that fanaticism, which has disgraced alike, religion and human nature? but from a lazy, implicit faith in the articles and creeds

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creeds of fallible men; from a partial view of the scheme of divine truth. Hence all those sentiments that disgrace religion, by contracting the spirits, or souring the tempers of mankind, or by rendering it the tool of a party, and prostituting a heavenly religion to the purposes of a political craft. While such a spirit remains in the Christian church, superstition cannot fail to gain ground, and infidelity will increase in proportion; for those of a more liberal turn of mind, - perceiving the unreasonableness and folly of the popular and current religion, and withal, not sufficiently ingenuous to examine the original records of revelation, will disbelieve and despise it.

I have already observed that a free, candid, and manly enquiry, settled into a firm and rational persuasion, can alone be a permanent foundation or lasting principle of faith: without this foundation what is our faith, but a baseless fabrick, a mere visionary building to be overturned by the first change in the popular belief. What is such a faith against the
strength

strength of opposite arguments, or the force of ridicule; or method of reasoning at present in high use. It is true, these can produce no effect upon him whose religion is the result of conviction and choice, supported by an honest heart and the sincere love of truth. But a religion that comes of course, a traditional religion from father to son, that which is generally taken for granted, for it is the religion of the multitude, a few arguments, the soft calls of passion, a laugh or a sneer from the croud, the caprice of a father, a wife, or a friend, can easily (as we often perceive) overturn the uncemented structure, and the whole system of faith may vanish at once. The cause of this, we learn from the words of the text; "he built his house without a foundation," and the materials were put together without thought or concern. Perhaps they thought it proper to make some profession, in order to be like the rest of the world — but (to pursue the simile) it is evident they were extremely indifferent as to the event. The structure was without doubt gayly ornamented, but it was
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the creature of an hour; the stream of pride or complacency, interest, or ambition, beat vehemently against it, and immediately it fell, because it had no foundation.

The building then is our faith, reason, and conscience the rock upon which the superstructure of religion ought to be founded. The streams, which we all must expect to beat against the house are different, as the relations, circumstances, or constitutions of men may vary. In one man, pride may blot out the faint lines of religion in the heart; in another, ambition may swallow up all his concern; another, in pursuit of glory, may plunge into the scenes of war, and amidst the horrors of bloodshed, forget the more tender calls of religion and humanity; while another can spare no time from the hurry of getting rich to make any profession. Another may forfeit his integrity, by a softness of nature, or criminal indifference. In short, the allegorical scheme in the text, is no other than the different passions which dwell in different bosoms; the different objects which strike different senses; or those temptations,

tions, which, though different, all must encounter.

But let the flood beat ever so vehemently, let the stream be ever so impetuous, its effects are vain; the structure will mock its fury, because it is founded on a rock; it may shake, and perhaps in some degree loosen it, but it will again cement. Thus the wise and good man is a creature imperfect and weak, he may be staggered by temptations, but he recovers again.

But the house built upon the ground without a foundation, what prospect is there, that it can escape the fury of the storm?

In the same manner when one makes a fair profession of religion, no accident, or any disagreeable circumstance, troubling his repose, he may go on without interruption. But suppose him avaricious, and interest requires him to make a shipwreck of the faith: suppose him ambitious, that his religion stands in his way to conquest and glory; or suppose him a lover of gait, and the religion he happens to profess be inconsistent with the character of the man of the world: — Supposing any of these to

happen to him whose faith is not founded on a rock; to a man, whose religion is the effect of chance, who was nursed up in it as the belief of his father, without giving himself any trouble to examine its reasonableness and divinity; what would be the consequence? an immediate apostacy, without scruple or compunction of heart. Exactly in the same manner would he act, who has an enlarged, rational, and comprehensive knowledge of religion, and whose profession is the effect of choice; but, at the same time, wants that integrity of heart, which is necessary to render his faith effectual and useful: — with this difference, the first must feel a little uneasiness, or a transient shame for quitting his profession; the latter, if he carries any remaining seeds of virtue in his bosom, must feel a keen and painful remorse.

Be it as it may, a wise man will erect the superstructure on the foundation of truth and reason, and a good man will not be ashamed to own his principles, and exhibit them to the world.

If

If we examine, attentively, into the circumstances of the gospel, while under the immediate patronage of its blessed author; the sentiments of mankind, with regard to this new institution, and the consequence of embracing it; we shall perceive in the strongest light, the truth, elegance, and force of our Saviour's simile in the text.

National, or established religions I believe, in all places, and at all times, have been adorned with all the trappings of external shew; and in general have had more of external appearance and pomp, than of real worth and intrinsic moral excellence. Eastern nations have been always remarkable for idle pageantries, and useless magnificence; it was natural for them to carry their prevailing foibles into religion, and decorate it with all the gaudy ornaments of superstition. They did so, and none more than the Jews; the temple of Jerusalem exhibited a magnificence unparalleled in the annals of any nation. But what was the consequence? pure and undefiled religion, manly and rational devotion, evaporated

ated into empty forms, trifling ceremonies, and affected grimace. The tears of penitence, humble contrition, and unfeigned sorrow for sin, were changed for a more commodious method of burnt offerings and sacrifices; and in proportion, as extortion, injustice, and every instance of villainy increased, the phylacteries of the priests, and the sacrifices of the rich increased: religion was a considerable loser by the exchange; while men worked themselves into a belief that their sacrifices were sufficient commutations for their breaches of the moral law: religion received considerable decorations, but its most sacred laws were violated with impunity. In such a state of things, what chance had the religion of Jesus to establish itself so near the temple, where vice and impiety received the sanction of outward holiness. A religion divested of all outward pomp, proposing no gay trifles to sooth and delight the vitiated taste of the people; a religion, whose patrons were in low circumstances; a religion, that with the most awful sanctions insisted upon a thorough reformation in the conduct, a purity

of heart, honesty of intentions, piety and obedience to God, and the most unlimited goodwill to mankind; was not likely to have many votaries. Our Saviour gives a most striking view of the indisposition of the Jewish people to the reception of the gospel, under the parable, or allegory, of a man making a great supper, who bade many: "And sent out his servant at supper time, to say to them that were bidden, come, for all things are now ready: and they all, with one consent, began to make excuses. The first said unto him; I have bought a piece of ground; and I must go and see it, I pray thee have me excused. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go and prove them, I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Luke xiv. 17, 20.

In those days, it was a proof of the most ingenuous mind; of a heart, influenced by the love of truth, unbiassed by pride and selfishness; of a fortitude superior to ridicule, abuse, or persecution: in short, it was an act of virtue to believe the gospel. But how was this

primitive virtue heightened by a steady perseverance in the truth? Christianity was discountenanced and persecuted by those in power; solemnly condemned by the crafty priests. The sophists despised this institution of supreme wisdom as foolishness. The men of wit discouraged it. In short all sorts of men put their heads and hands together to crush at once the religion of Jesus of Nazareth. It was, therefore, necessary for a man, who embraced Christianity, to come prepared for every sort of treatment. And how could this be done? riches and honour, the pride of life, the sweets of ease and luxury, the inducements of company, the remonstrances of a parent, a wife, or a friend, were powerful motives to go on as they began, and continue in the religion of the multitude; or after they had embraced Christianity to renounce it, and devote themselves once more to the ceremonies of the Jew, or idolatry of the heathen. This in fact was often the case, insomuch, that our Saviour asked his disciples: "Will ye also go and leave me." But Peter answered like an honest worthy
man

man and a lover of truth ; " whither shall we go ? with thee are the words of eternal life." Hence then the necessity that our faith should be well grounded, that our religion should be founded on a rock : Upon a full conviction of its truth, reasonableness, and importance. With justice, then might our Saviour say ; " who-soever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings and doth them ; that is, continues under the influence of the gospel, I will shew to whom he is like ; he is like a man building a house, who digged, and went deep, and laid the foundation upon the rock ; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon the house and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the ground ; or, as St. Matthew has it, built it upon the sand ; against which the stream beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

The house then is our faith: Reason and integrity the rock upon which the superstructure

ought to be founded. No storm can then overturn the building; safe in the consciousness of the truth, importance, and divinity of our faith, and an honest regard to our duty. But if we build upon the sand; if incredulity, superstition, or fanaticism are the only foundations of our faith and principles; a thousand accidents may then demolish the airy structure. And let it also be observed, that if we build our hopes of salvation upon any other foundation than that of the gospel; if we quit the rules laid down by Jesus Christ, and strike out others more conformable to a depraved reason, or a corrupted heart; our fair structure is a mere delusion, or at best a castle built upon the sand; which, upon the first assault will fall upon our heads; and at once destroy our ill-founded hopes and fantastic expectations. If, for instance, we believe that an external profession is sufficient to render heaven propitious; or a rectitude of opinion, a violent zeal for a particular doctrine, or mode of religion; or a strength of faith, separate from real virtue, justice, mercy, and truth;

truth; our hopes of heaven and immortality will, in the end, prove as ill-founded as a house built upon the sand. It is necessary then, not only to hear and believe, but to obey the voice of Christ. This is the only foundation; for Christians to build their hopes of a happy futurity, upon any other foundation, is treacherous, and will one day disappoint their most sanguine hopes.

Let us then examine ourselves, and build up our faith upon reason: and may it prove the source of an amiable and virtuous conduct here, and of a blessed eternity hereafter. Amen.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V,

H E B. VI. 1.

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God.

IN the preceding chapter the Apostle distinguishes between the priests instituted or ordained by the law, and the High-priest of our profession, even Christ Jesus the righteous. *“ For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins :*
who

who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself is compassed with infirmity. Thus, while he felt the weakness and infirmities of human nature, he might be touched with the meltings of compassion for those who through ignorance, deliberate transgression, or wilful depravity, laid themselves open to the punishment of the law. In the same manner the Captain of our salvation was touched with our infirmities, though without sin. He knew how frail our nature was, how easy to be deceived, how apt to be caught by appearances, and how often insensible of our real interest and happiness. A generous pity, a divine compassion, and sympathising benevolence inspired his tender bosom when he saw mankind as sheep without a shepherd. With the most amiable tenderness, and more than the feelings of humanity, did he weep over a faithless and cruel people. What kindness is expressed when he expostulates with Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem! that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even

even as a hen gathereth her chicken under her wing, and ye would not."

In the next place he goes on to shew, that no one taketh the honour of the priesthood to himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. In the same manner the Christian high priest bears the sanction of a divine commission.

"So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my son, to day have I begotten thee." But the priests under the law were mortal. It was necessary, in order to fill up the wastes of death, that there should be a constant rotation, that fresh priests should be instituted, to fill up the places of those who had paid the general debt of humanity. But Christ is a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec. And here it may not be amiss to explain the meaning of the expression, *A priest after the order of Melchisedec*. The writer of this epistle helps us to the meaning in chap. vii. 2. "first being, (viz. Melchisedec) by interpretation, King of Righteousness; and after that, also King

King of Salem, which is King of Peace." Our Saviour, therefore, with the greatest propriety, might be called a Priest after the order of Melchisedec, as he came to fulfil and establish all righteousness, to give immaculate precepts of true religion, to enforce the great duties of morality, to confirm the truth, and to manifest his sincerity by giving mankind the most illustrious example of virtue; shewing in every part of his amiable conduct the most inviolable attachment to justice and integrity, to truth and purity, and every branch of universal righteousness. "For though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." He was, in the second place, a King of Peace. Isaiah, by the spirit of inspiration, had, ages before, stiled him, "The Prince of Peace;" and at his introduction to humanity, a company of heavenly inhabitants became the heralds of this Prince of Peace, giving, in their angelic hymn, a sketch of his future character, and the benefits accruing
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to the world by his reign. "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." The spirit of his religion breathes the same harmonious, kind, and peaceful disposition. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when persecuted, he persecuted not again; but with the most exalted stretch of goodness and philanthropy he prayed for his enemies. This is the character of our great High Priest; "of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be understood or uttered, since ye are dull of hearing; for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat." Thus the writer of this epistle complains, of the carelessness, indifference, and lethargic dispositions of the Hebrew Christians. They shewed not sufficient love to the truth, no thirst after knowledge, and the important and difficult science of the gospel; and on this account he admonishes them in the words of the text, to "learn the principles of the doctrine of

S E R M O N V.

63

of Christ, not laying again the foundation of repentance and of faith towards God."

Having been taught the principles and rudiments of Christianity, let us go on in search of truth, to examine with candour into the more important and difficult doctrines of religion; *let us go on unto perfection*, not again to examine the evidences of religion, of which already we have been fully convinced; nor be daily obliged, by a course of disobedience, *to lay the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God.*

And in our age, when enthusiasm and ignorance on the one hand, and cold indifference and dissipation on the other, enervate the powers of reason, weaken the ties of religion, and prevent manly and virtuous enquiries after sound knowledge; can it be thought unnecessary or superfluous to enforce the holy sentiment contained in the text?

In all ages, mankind have been too apt to rest satisfied with those discoveries of truth, however small, that have been made by their fore-fathers, which have been instilled into them

them in the inexperienced days of childhood, or youth; or with those which may be easily attained. "Much study," saith the royal preacher, "is a weariness to the flesh." Free, candid, and manly disquisitions into the nature of things, and the important mysteries of truth and religion, have been deemed more troublesome than useful. Some, indeed, whose lot it is to earn their bread by the efforts of industry, can afford no time from the numerous avocations of life to pursue the footsteps of truth and knowledge; while others, to favour a habit of vicious indolence, pretend to be unequal to the task: but when Heaven has instilled into our bosoms the principles of intelligence; when the same kind Being has favoured us with a Revelation, it is, by the assistance of the Divine Spirit, in our power; and consequently it is our duty to make all possible and proportionable improvements in knowledge, and in goodness.

.. Shall we, who are Christians and Protestants, dwell contented in the gloom of ignorance, or meanly follow the ensigns of superstition? or
rather,

rather, using the liberty with which Christ has made us free, in investigating the truth, and forming our principles of faith from the observations of impartial reason, and the infallible standard and all-sufficient rules of the gospel of Christ. Shall we regard Calvin, Luther, or Arminius as the fathers of our faith? or must we believe with the multitude, and draw the articles of our creed from the established system? or rather, should we not consult St. Paul, and from him, as from an inspired author, collect our articles of belief, as well as rules of conduct? From the most perfect and judicious of mankind, unassisted by inspiration, we can gather, at best, but a dubious information; but what we learn from the gospel is steady, certain, and infallible truth; truth not merely speculative, but practical and useful; as our future happiness and salvation is most intimately connected with it.

Hence, then, we infer, that it is the duty and interest of the followers of Christ to endeavour at a constant improvement in knowledge,

and in all the virtues and graces of Christianity ; to follow their great Leader, not at an awful distance, so as to be scarcely able to observe his footsteps, or to perceive the amiableness of his example, his religion, or its several obligations, but to attend closely, to inspect narrowly the truth and divinity of his doctrines, and the reasonableness and propriety of all the commandments and institutions of the gospel. There is a pleasure attending the investigation of all truth, even though it be purely speculative ; but the truths of Christianity are too nearly connected with our happiness and salvation to be merely speculative ; they are practical, useful, and important truths. Having, therefore, the principles of the doctrine of Christ ; having the first rudiments of Christianity ; by the profession of which they were initiated into the number of the family and elect of God, the Gentile world were admitted into the kingdom of Christ, were taught the great principles of natural religion, the being and unity of God ; and they were to worship him

him as sole, supreme author and governor of the universe. Upon their professing their faith in God, they were fully instructed in the principles and rudiments of revealed religion; such as to confess that Jesus was the son of God; that he was a divine teacher, sent from God; that his words were the words of truth. They were also taught the reason and propriety of being initiated into the Christian church, and of the laying on of hands. But to the Jews, as they believed the unity of God, and the truth and divinity of ancient prophecies, it was only necessary at first to prove to them, that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah, the promised Deliverer of Israel; and, in short, that the old dispensation was now superseded by a more perfect and everlasting one, founded upon better promises. Thus, then, it appears, that multitudes of the primitive disciples might, in general, acknowledge themselves Christians, when, at the same time, they knew very little of the spirit and design of this holy institution. And, indeed, the

apostles themselves, before the descent of the Holy Ghost, seem to have unworthy and gross ideas of it. Neither they nor the other disciples could immediately emerge from the darkness of ignorance and superstition, into their marvellous light, and a comprehensive knowledge of the Christian religion. Hence, then, the propriety of their making farther enquiries after the truth; of examining deeper into the scheme of their redemption; of their attempting after high degrees of perfection, in the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The advice contained in the text is highly applicable to us, and to all Christians; for who can be said to have a sufficient knowledge of truth? Can we be too wise, or too good? If not, we are to endeavour at every attainable perfection in wisdom and goodness. The reward will finally be more than proportioned to our most ardent toil. A happiness in this world will flow from a just and comprehensive view of things, from a just and rational sense of the religion we profess, and of the
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rule of moral conduct; and in the world to come, "They that be wise shall shine as the ~~brightness of the firmament, and as the stars,~~ for ever and ever."

S E R M O N VI.

F 3

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

I. THESSALONIANS, V. 21.

Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.

THE Apostle, as a faithful minister of the gospel of Christ, among a great number of admonitions; the proper observance of which constitutes the character of a truly religious and good man; gives us a noble idea of the truth and excellency of his persuasion, and the open undisguised sincerity of his own heart; in this remarkable passage, which I
have

have chosen for my present text; "Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

The reasonableness and use of this precept will strongly appear, if we apply it either to the unscriptural positions, that cunning and insinuating men began thus early to spread; or, as it is the natural right of all men to prove and examine every object of belief, and to suspend their judgment, till they find it either absurd, and to be rejected, or reasonable and worthy their most ardent pursuit. Here Christianity is held out to the nicest and most critical scrutiny. Its doctrines and precepts are laid open to every honest and fair enquirer. And the apostles very frequently commended those who did not implicitly believe; those who did not acquiesce in the bare words of men; but proved and examined things thoroughly. And hence the Bereans were stiled noble, for they searched the scriptures to see whether those things were so; and in my opinion, it is a most noble disposition, and deserves to be applauded wherever it is found. Persons endued with it, will not be found wavering

ing, and like other baseless structures, liable to be overturned by every breath of wind. Their persuasion is the effect of conviction, and the articles of their faith supported by reason and good sense. While those of a contrary temper, imbibe all the prevailing errors: Custom and antiquity lead them, as it were, hoodwinked through all the gloomy cells of ignorance and superstition; the religion of their fathers, is the great standard of righteousness; while others, of a more volatile constitution, greedily catch at every fashionable novelty. Every new thought seems to carry a demonstration with it; and without examining, they instantly embrace it, as the great criterion of truth. Hence the success that has attended some popish missionaries. Hence the reason that they have been able to lead such a number of seemingly reasonable beings, through all the mazes of folly, extravagancy, and wild enthusiasm; their honest, but weak and deluded followers, swallowed hastily whatever was delivered to them by their teachers; allowing themselves no time to consider the tendency

endency of their tenets. They have discarded reason, the glory and ornament of human nature; and set up for guide the voice of the spirit, or more properly speaking the notions of their enflamed and unruly passions. And thus they become open to receive the most monstrous absurdities, and consequently embrace such doctrines as are diametrically opposite to the light of nature, and the clear, revealed word of God. These things shew the necessity of obeying the precept contained in the text, of proving all things, and holding fast that which is good.

The reason of this will easily appear, if we reflect how mankind are brought upon this stage of existence. That it is in such circumstances as render them for some time incapable of any knowledge. But as they grow up, reason begins to dawn, they gradually combine the powers of thought, and gain fresh ideas by instruction and reflection. But their tender minds are susceptible of almost any impressions. Children, like tender officers, take the bow. What is instilled into them in their infancy,

fancy,

fancy, grows up in manhood, and at last becomes a settled principle of action, and from every thing I can observe, it seems probable, that even injustice, cruelty, rapine, and murder; crimes, at the thoughts of which, our hearts recoil; may, by varied precept and example, so far pervert the design of nature; so far confound the powers of reason, and destroy all the seeds of virtue, as to be rendered entirely pleasing and agreeable to men. The offspring of the wicked tread generally in the footsteps of their parents; and this is not certainly owing to an original depravity of their natures, but wholly to the influence of bad examples. This might be easily made manifest, if we reflect on the tempers and dispositions of our neighbours, the French, and other popish nations. There, youth are taught such a high veneration for their priests, that they soon look upon them as the oracles of heaven, and are fully persuaded of their infallibility. They gradually imbibe the principles of persecution, till at last they become so void of all humanity, and so absurd as to think

it their duty to extirpate all other religions, and their professors out of the world.

But we need go no farther than our own country for the proof of this truth. Here we may behold youth trained up to some set of principles, though not very consonant to reason; yet when they come of age, and capable of forming a right judgment, and to think for themselves; we generally see them rest satisfied, and seldom trouble their heads about the truth, or reasonableness of what they have embraced. They think the fund of knowledge they have already attained, sufficient to carry them through life; while others are left equally indifferent to all things: When the scale is even, the least grain put into one end will make that preponderate; and we generally see these men run after the giddy multitude, and take it for granted that the majority must have truth on their side.

But that man is an instance of the greatness of the human soul, who can rise above the little and mean prejudices of education; who seems to be led by custom, or influenced by passion.

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But faithfully compares and examines the several doctrines of religion that are offered to his belief; lays aside all partiality and blind passion, and makes reason his sole guide and instruction. For we must not part with reason, or stifle the light of it, in order to perceive the beauty of Christianity. Such a method (though warmly insisted upon by some people of authority amongst us) seems an infallible way of introducing all the foppery and absurdities of popery and paganism, amongst the clear and reasonable doctrines of Christ.

Nothing is more consistent, and more agreeable to our circumstances, as imperfect creatures; than that we should be careful to prove and examine every object of belief, before we give our assent. To a neglect of this, we may justly attribute, not only the growth of infidelity and scepticism, but in a particular manner the unreasonable doctrines that have been imposed upon the Christian world; had mankind but carefully examined and compared them by reason and scripture, when they began to be introduced, they might have been easily con-

futed in their infancy, and a stop put to their dreadful effects.

But now *antiquity* has made them sacred, and scriptural in the sight of some indolent and prejudiced persons. And like the moral traditions of the Jews are more revered than the express word of God. But it is not my design to point out the absurdity of any particular doctrines or opinions that are embraced by some Christians; for it is next to an impossibility that we should be free from some mistakes; or that we should all agree in sentiments: While there is a difference in the capacities of mankind, there will naturally remain some difference in speculations. But I could sincerely wish and pray for that happy time, when people will become not so deeply attached to any set of principles, as to think them above being enquired into. Some will be apt to say, that it is quite indifferent what we believe; but that opinion is grounded on a mistake: for it supposes that sentiments have no influence on practice, which experience daily confutes. For instance, Roman Catholics

tholics are taught to believe, that it is their duty to destroy all other sects of religion; and we see whenever they have an opportunity they faithfully act up to their belief: besides, the doctrine that good actions will be of no manner of service to us in furthering our salvation; has made a great many people quite indifferent whether they do virtuous or vicious actions. I need not enlarge on this head, for both observation and experience prove, beyond contradiction, that all the different actions that are performed by men, are entirely owing to different principles.

I shall, therefore, make only a few observations, which naturally arise from this subject.

1st. Since mankind are so liable to mistakes, and so subject to embrace doctrines which are not only false in the nature of things, but likewise have a very bad influence on the lives and morals of Christians, it follows, that it is not only our duty, but as beings designed for immortality, our highest interest to comply with the precept enforced in the text; of proving,
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all things, and holding fast that which is good ; that is, we should be not only very cautious what we admit as articles of our faith ; but likewise examine carefully what we have already embraced, and look upon as the truth. Have I need to inform any of you ? you already know, and are fully persuaded that doctrines repugnant to reason and scripture, have been fathered upon the holy authors ; that the purity and simplicity of the gospel have been corrupted and perverted by ignorant designing men. And that those, who consistent with their duty and function ; have endeavoured, by the strongest arguments to withstand them and to restore Christianity to its native purity, have been charged with heresy and schism ; but let not this discourage any of you in your searches after truth : let it not hinder any efforts for supporting the glorious cause of liberty : assert your freedom as men and Christians, the undoubted privilege of all reasonable creatures ; dare to think and believe for yourselves ; let neither prevailing errors nor fashionable iniquity, have any influence on your conduct.

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It was this principle that animated and supported our forefathers, the reformers. It was this that enabled them to wade through tides of blood, to rescue us from the bondage and slavtry of popery, and brought truth to light, though guarded by the dragon with ten heads. It was the love of liberty that inclined a great number of worthy subjects of this nation, to abandon their native country in time of persecution, to seek for freedom in a strange land. And shall we, who have the privilege of serving our Maker, according to the dictates of conscience, and the prescriptions of his word: shall we, who are blessed with a toleration, and suffered to think, and act as reason directs; shall we, notwithstanding all, suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the craft of others? shall we sit indolent in the midst of darkness, when the great light of the gospel shines in our land?

2dly. The consideration, that we ourselves are liable to be mistaken as others, should teach us charity towards our fellow Christians. We should not look upon ourselves as the
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great criterions of truth, and run down and persecute others for not thinking as we think. As we know that it is quite absurd to suppose that creatures of different natural abilities, and very different education, should exactly agree in sentiments; when we reprove we should do it with candour and humility; and not out of blind partiality for any set of principles; but with a view to the edification of mankind: in short, we should always, with St. Paul, both in principles and practice, mind whatsoever things are honest, just, worthy, and of good report; love one another; and in all our conduct, aim at the glory of God, the interest of religion, and the good of our fellow creatures in general; that leading holy and pious lives, we may, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shine as lights in the world, be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.

S E R M O N VII.

M A R K X. 16.

And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

IT is a sentiment natural to the human mind, that virtue is entitled to the favour of Heaven; and that real holiness, or an unfeigned sanctity of life, can influence the determinations of the Supreme Being! And if we carefully examine this principle, we shall find that it is not like a great many articles of human faith, the offspring of delusion, interested views, or selfish prejudices, but formed upon
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a mature, just, and enlarged comprehension of the ways of God, and the laws of his kingdom; equally grounded in truth and nature, as in the idea of divine rectitude and goodness.

If the conduct of moral agents is to be determined according to a fixed and invariable standard; it follows, that a being, whose life is regulated by this model, is, in justice, entitled to the protection and privileges of those laws it obeys, as well as the esteem and friendship of the governor. Upon this principle, all the regulations of society have been formed; upon this they depend for stability and force; and without this fundamental principle, government would degenerate into a system of despotism, or to a mere piece of pageantry and idle shew.

But the most regular, wise, and just systems of government among mankind, partake, more or less, of the general traits of imperfection and weakness. The most obedient and virtuous citizen is not always raised to places of the highest eminence and trust in the state; on the contrary, he is often overlooked in the croud,

and given up to obscurity and want; while those with infinitely less merit to recommend them, but favoured by lucky circumstances, the breath of caprice, a bold, enterprizing genius, are raised to honour, power, and wealth. The friends and dependents of the great, however unworthy, partake of the public emoluments; while the wise and good frequently have no other advantage from mixing in society, than the bare consideration of enjoying the effects of their own painful industry in peace; which by the way is often interrupted.

But the divine government, as it is universal in its extent, is founded on an infinite and just comprehension of things and circumstances; regular in its executions, and unbiassed by any other motives than those of rectitude in its distributions of rewards or punishments. The good man is in no danger of losing the reward of his virtue; and impenitent vice in vain seeks a retreat from the sanctions of the divine law. It is a just consequence, then, that virtue, in all its variety of attitudes, is the object of
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his regard and love. But at the same time, it is a false conclusion, that if the virtuous is favoured by Heaven, his influence is sufficient to recommend worthless objects to the esteem and friendship of the great God: for then he must ever act at random, and contrary to the constitutions of his kingdom: and he is, of his own accord, infinitely propitious to the good and worthy. But here lies the mistake; mankind have represented the Deity such a one as themselves; they conclude, that as their own friendships are too apt to degenerate to fondness and partiality, he must act in the same manner. The intercession of a friend is, with us, generally sufficient to determine us in favour of a stranger, whose real character is unknown to us, and whose weakness, caprice, folly, and vice, are glazed over by the partial hand of friendship. But the Deity is not to be deceived; he sees through the misrepresentations of characters, and acts according to the fixed standard of the divine constitution, that is, according to truth, equity, and goodness:

so that the intercession of an angel cannot influence the actions of the Supreme Governor, or render him propitious to the world, or more so to a virtuous being than he is naturally inclined to be. The fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much; not indeed by a perversion of the laws of the kingdom of Heaven, but by sweetening his own temper, and thereby drawing a double portion of blessedness upon his own virtuous head: but it is by no means to be admitted, that the prayers of the good man can alter the Divine intention, or withhold the arm of justice.

Moral goodness, or holiness, is a mere personal accomplishment; unrighteousness is also a personal defect. The reward and punishment, the blessing or curse, must be also personal; neither of these, or their effects, can, in the nature of things, be transferred to another object. With these leading principles to direct us, let us examine the reason and propriety of our Saviour's conduct, as mentioned in the words of the text; "And he took them up in
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his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

This transaction is also recorded by Matthew * and Luke. The former observes, there were brought to him little children, that he should put his hands upon them, and pray; and his disciples rebuked them; but Jesus said, *Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come to me; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven: and he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*"

It was an antient custom among the Jews to bring their children to such as were remarkable for the sanctity of their lives, to receive their touch and blessing, from a fond persuasion that the touch and prayer of a good man were effectual to avert evils, and to influence the Deity in their favour. And what is recorded in the text was no new thing, but had been the custom for ages. The practice, however, sprang from wrong principles, and a misapprehension of the Divine Nature. But it is to be observed here, that errors in sentiment are not, in themselves, criminal; for they arise from the

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* Matt. xix. 13. 15. Luke, xviii. 15. 17.

imperfection of humanity, and the circumstances to which we are unavoidably subjected.

In the case before us, the parents' conduct was truly amiable, though their views and expectations were grounded in a mistake. It was amiable, as it sprung from a parental tenderness and anxiety; which is so far a virtue, as it is cherishing the principles of humanity, and giving way to the voice of nature.— It is true, the Creator has left these affections strongly impressed on the mind; but at the same time it is not impossible to wipe them off, and to admit and cherish the passions of pride, avarice, and ill-nature, so as, in a great measure, if not wholly, (as is sometimes the case with the most abandoned) to suppress the sensations of parental fondness. This principle is, indeed, generally a very blind one, but yet is a very lovely and engaging disposition; and it is certain, that those who are most influenced by it, are generally the most virtuous and best: it can never dwell alone; it is always more or less accompanied with the virtues of general humanity or social benevolence, justice, good-nature,

nature, generosity, and truth ; and I believe I may venture to affirm, that the first step to virtue in a child is to love his parents.

Upon this principle, we must look with candour and regard upon those parents who brought their children to Christ ; — it is not our province to condemn them, but rather to imitate them in some measure ; as those first professors brought their children to Christ to receive his blessing, Christians now ought to manifest their affection to their offspring by a careful attention to bring them up in the knowledge of the gospel, and in the practice of religion. It is true, we cannot always succeed in our endeavours ; but parental love can never exhibit itself in a more engaging manner than in this important attempt.

Let us now proceed to examine in what manner the history of this transaction is preserved by St. Luke. * His words are these : —
“ And they brought unto him infants, that he might touch them ; but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them ; but Jesus said, Suffer little

* Luke, xviii. 15. 17.

little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven: verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God, as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein."

In Matthew it is said, "he laid his hands on them, and blessed them." Luke records, that children were brought to him, but is silent as to the circumstances of blessing and laying his hands on them; he had seen the gospel of Matthew and Mark, and thought it unnecessary to repeat those circumstances.

But John, who wrote last, passes over the whole transaction; as looking upon it to be sufficiently authenticated by the other Evangelists.

From a proper attention to the history of this fact, and, in particular, from that taken notice of by the three Gospels, that the disciples rebuked the parents for this mark of their affection; there is no reason to doubt, but that those who were brought to Christ were children incapable of receiving any benefit from the instructions of this heavenly Teacher; —

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their rational and intellectual powers were not as yet ripe for the reception of the truth. — What advantage, then, could they reap from the blessings of the Messiah? none; — for the conduct of the Deity towards them could only be determined by their future behaviour: — their conversation, when they attained to reason and moral agency, was to insure the favour, or incur the displeasure of Heaven.

Let us, then, examine the propriety and reason of our Saviour's conduct in this affair.

1st Obf. Prejudice, when once it has established itself in the mind, is not easily rooted up. But gentle methods are perhaps the only means to deliver us from its chains; violent methods rivet them more powerfully, and give us a stronger attachment to them. He, then, who is acquainted with mankind, will humour them a little, in order to persuade and convince them by degrees; and when this useful compliment is made to the pride of opinion, the soul will be left more at liberty to exert and judge for itself. More than once was the blessed Author of our religion compelled to
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make this sacrifice to the perverse world; but the event proved the great propriety of such a conduct. And this seems to me to be the case in the present object of enquiry. Had he, like his disciples, rebuked the fondness of those who brought their children to receive his caresses and benediction; — nothing can be more likely, than that such a conduct would have kindled the resentment of parental affection to such a height, as to render them afterwards the enemies of Christ and his gospel; whereas, by indulging them a little, he had an opportunity to turn their thoughts to more important objects. And indeed this occasion gave him an opportunity to delineate, in the strongest manner, the amiable features of Christianity; and while, by his tender caresses, his fond endearments, he manifested his own gracious and kind affections, and his love of humanity, he shewed, in his own character, the real, benign spirit of the gospel; and at the same time, held up to their view, in the person of an infant, an emblem of the nature and genius of his holy religion. This was, in
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some sense, bringing good out of evil; or rather, improving a mistake to the purposes, advantage, and enlargement of the truth. —

“ And he took them up in his arms, *and embraced them*, and put his hands upon them, *and blessed them*; or, as it might be rendered, *spoke well of them*; that is, by kind and tender expressions, soothed the affections of the parents.

It is likely that, upon such occasions, other teachers were wont to use pompous benedictions, or prophetic promises of their future greatness and glory; perhaps something in the same manner that Simeon and Anna, by the inspiration of God, spoke of our Saviour. But upon this occasion, he spoke in another manner, treated them with endearments, and used the tender language of benevolence and love. Thus he satisfied the anxiety of the parents, and turned their thoughts to a right apprehension of things; teaching them to expect no effects to attend this formality, and that the way to obtain the favour of Heaven was by a freedom from sin, and a life corresponding

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to the laws of God. We are justified in this explication of the words of the text by what preceeds them : " Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

That is, whoever receives not the gospel as a little child, that is, free from prejudice, or with a spirit of candour and a love of the truth, cannot be my disciple.

Such an improvement of the words of the text will give us a just idea of this dispensation of goodness and truth ; will teach us what rule of life to choose, as most agreeable to Heaven ; and with our own vigorous application, will qualify us for that immortality and happiness it promises to all sincere believers. And the last inference I shall draw from what has been said, is, that we are to rely upon no other foundation for an acceptance at the throne of God than our own personal virtue ; a life devoted to the practice of all righteousness ; affections purified by the exercise of our moral powers in the paths of spiritual truth ; a conduct regular and uniform in the ways
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of God, uninfluenced by the threats or allurements of the world, and ever guided by reason, by nature, and the wisdom which is of God, supported by the hopes of a blessed futurity.

S E R M O N

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S E R M O N VIII.

A C T S IV. 32.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and one soul; neither said any of them, that ought, of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

WHAT an amiable representation of the first society of Christians! how pleasing and delightful the retrospect of these first elect of the gospel! while the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers, "animated with the genuine spirit of bigotry and superstition, gathered together against the Lord, and

and against his Christ;" in order to destroy an heavenly institution, and quench the first blaze of mental light. "The multitude of believers were of one heart and one soul;" happy in the protection of Heaven, and in the mutual esteem, friendship, and support of each other. All the strife and emulation that possessed their virtuous bosoms were, who should exhibit the fairest pattern of piety towards God, and submission to his providence; who should feel the tenderest regard for the good of mankind; and manifest the most extensive and godlike benevolence; — generous strife! heavenly, divine ambition, never enough to be admired, never enough to be imitated! How different from this has been the spirit of imposture in all ages? It is calculated to soften the ferocity of human nature, to unite individuals in the bands of social harmony and love; to raise the soul above every mean pursuit, every sinful attachment: to keep us from the bias of prejudice, superstition,

and partiality; to give the mind a taste for improvement and knowledge, and to this end giving sanction to the virtue of free enquiry, and establishing a philosophical and divine liberty of thought and judgment, unaccountable to any tribunal but that of God! Such is the institution of the gospel, calculated for universal good! such is that religion, which becalms our tumultuous passions, and gives peace to the troubled mind! which, at times, has been "every where spoken against." Such was the original dispensation of grace and truth, which at first "was spoken by the Lord, and confirmed by signs and miracles, and divers wonders;" but since, has been perverted and disgraced by the art and policy of wicked men. That religion, which commanded a free and unprejudiced enquiry, and approved of the generous exertions of unbiassed reason, is now made an instrument in the hands of power, to warp the soul, contract its views, and vitiate the pure affections of humanity; the minds
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of Christians have been shackled by *creeds and articles of faith* of human invention, and the far greater part of them most palpably absurd; these have been constituted the tests of truth, and the oracles of divinity, while religious tyranny stopped the currents of free enquiry, and cried out, "thus far shall ye go, and no farther."

That religion, which breathes the genuine spirit of candour and love; which united the first believers in the tenderest friendship and mutual hospitality; which taught them to overlook, or bear with the failings and infirmities of each other; has since been made a cloak for the most barbarous infringements on the liberties of mankind: that religion, dictated by infinite wisdom, has been made to speak the language of folly and superstition, and absurdities, contradictions, and manifest falshoods, have been fathered upon the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Good God! how fatal has this been to the enlargement of the

human mind; how destructive to the peace and welfare of individuals and societies in general! Instead of living in mutual amity, and like the first of those that believed, to have, as it were, but one heart and one soul; mutual distrust, contracted avarice, and proud ambition have soured the tempers of Christians, and interrupted the stream of public and private love. Mourn, ye Christians, over the ruins of the gospel; or rather, contribute your parts to remove the heap of superstition, and to weed the noxious tares of error and delusion from the pure grains of truth, knowledge, and virtue. The task is not difficult, if we draw our information from the gospel itself, without having recourse to the dictates of fallible men. Those who are willing shall know the truth. Heaven will guide their honest researches; the candle of the Lord will brighten the darkened page, and give them to understand the truth as it is in Jesus: to those that knock, the gate of knowledge will be opened,

to those that ask it with a becoming spirit, their heavenly father will explain to them the doctrines of grace and salvation.

But it is not sufficient to denominate us Christians to have a thorough knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, it is also absolutely necessary practically to apply those heavenly doctrines and precepts to our lives and dispositions. A thorough knowledge of religion, and a full and firm persuasion of its truth and excellency are requisite; for a splendid profession of it, in compliance to established customs, neither betters the community or individuals. It is necessary that we should feel its sacred truths operate in our hearts, and shine forth in our conversations; and in particular that a benevolent enlargement of soul should unite the several members of the church of Christ: which leads me to consider more particularly the words of the text, viz. "And the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of

them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

1st. Observation. We are not to infer from hence, that all the several members of the primitive church, or that "the multitude of them that believed," had all the same sentiments with regard to the *theory of religion*. A little reflection may soon convince us that was not the case.

In the first place then, it is certain that some of them had been members of the church longer than others: that is, there were some converted to Christianity before others; and in consequence had had more frequent opportunities to learn from the mouths of the apostles the nature, the design, and extent of the gospel. They had also more time to inform themselves upon these heads, from an examination and just application of the ancient prophecies. Add to this, that such are the various dispositions of mankind; such the *diversity*

variety of gifts; and mental abilities distributed among the children of men by the holy spirit; that supposing they had all equal opportunities of information and knowledge, it is more than probable that some would make quicker and far more extensive improvements in the faith, than others, equally inclineable to know the truth. Is it not flagrantly the case in these days in the Christian church? While some have made a rapid progress in the great mysteries of the gospel, there are others of equal standing, and equal opportunities for improvement, of whom may be said, "For when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God." Heb. v. 12.

To be *of one heart and one soul*; signifies then not an exact uniformity of opinion, or that they believed exactly alike, for we have already seen that it is impossible; at least while mankind continue circumstanced as they are

in this world. We infer then, that they were united in a far more tender and engaging manner; they were united by the spirit of benevolence and friendship: difference of opinion created no disturbance in this amiable society; all was forbearance, Christian charity, and brotherly love; all was calm repose and undisturbed harmony and peace. Gracious God! did Christians exhibit such a scene as this at present, how altered would the face of things appear! how delightful the converse of each Christian neighbour! instead of malice and envy, that corrode the heart, the heavenly principles of charity and love would take place; instead of mutual hypocrisy and distrust, sincerity would clear the mind of every baneful seed, jealousy, distrust, and fear. Candour would forgive the infirmities of its neighbour, and good-will exult to perceive a fellow creature happy!

From parallel expressions we are authorised to conclude this to be the apostle's meaning

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in the text; let us compare it with the 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th verses of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Philipians: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded; having the same love, of one accord, of one mind; let nothing be done through strife and vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others; let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The Apostle here inculcates an unity of mind, in kind and benevolent affections; so plain, that it needs no comment. Exactly parallel with this, is the 11th verse of the 13th of Gallatians. "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind; and the God of love and peace be with you." Thus the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and one mind or soul; that is, united in the bonds of charity and peace. Amiable society! happy people! thus they lived; supporting the weak, relieving the poor,
and

and pouring the healing balm of comfort to the distressed, afflicted mind. They stopped not even here: "for neither said any of them that ought, of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." What an amiable exertion of philanthropy, humanity, and love is here! does not every one that has the least portion of social benevolence in his heart, in fancy, mingle in this little, but generous and happy flock? But as amiable as this example appears, how delightful soever in contemplation; it is by no means to be imitated by us.

In the infancy of a community, if built upon the principles of honour, integrity, and virtue, the laws of hospitality are generally carried to a great height; each individual regards his neighbour as a part of his own family; joined by the same interest, and directed by the same views; each is anxious to advance the general safety, and unless cemented in this tender and strong

strong manner, the political structure must soon fall to the ground.

But when its members increase, this friendly enthusiasm, this zealous hospitality decreases in proportion; and it is necessary it should; otherwise trade and commerce, the props of society must stagnate; and those arts and sciences, which civilize and polish human nature, must for ever lie buried in dark obscurity and ignorance. Would the parent joyfully rise early and work late, would he deny himself the various soothing pleasures of life, if the stranger was to rob his children of the fruit of his industry?

A principle of benevolence is certainly implanted in our bosoms by the great author of our lives; and wherever it is properly exerted, it forms a character truly amiable; but it is possible to carry it too far, so as to degenerate to weakness and profusion. And is not his memory truly odious, who divides his substance among strangers, and gives up his nearest relations

relations to poverty and distress? But Providence, ever kind to the human race, has implanted a strong principle of affection within them; so strong indeed, that this rule of nature is very seldom violated. But there lies one very great and unfurmountable objection to a community of goods; that while one part of the society is involved in cares, fatigue, and labour, the other will sink into ease, pleasures and extravagance; thus the industrious few will, in the end, become slaves to the indolent and slothful.

The first Christian society, while harrassed, and persecuted by an ill-natured and wicked world, found it necessary to unite in the strictest bonds of amity and love; and while we admire the harmony, friendship, and the mutual support, the members oft afforded each other, we shall find such conduct absolutely necessary for the well being of the whole. But when Christianity became more established in the world, the inconvenience and bad tendency

dency of a community of goods became evident, and was therefore dropped: and, indeed, had it been proper, the gospel, which contains the best system of morals for the direction of human conduct, would have expressly commanded it.

We may, however, imitate the first Christians thus far, in giving bread to the hungry, clothing the naked, and bringing the stranger to the house; visiting the sick, and relieving, as far as we can, every object of charity. Mat. xxv. 35.

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

J O H N XIII. 15.

I have given you an example, that ye do as I have done unto you.

EVERY ingenuous mind may perceive in the character of Christ, the most amiable pattern of virtue, whether respecting God, ourselves, or our fellow-creatures. Indeed it is a most finished picture of every moral excellence and beauty. It is heightened with all the grace of a heavenly religion, a devotion rational, sublime, and manly; untainted with all vulgar prejudices, and rising infinitely superior

rior to all boasted, exalted characters which adorn the heathen world. His piety, free from the gloom of superstition, zealous without any enthusiastic fervors, was natural, easy, and sincere; it enlivened every picture of religion, and gave it a cheerful and lovely form.

A calm resignation to the purposes of Heaven, a submissive acquiescence in all the determinations of the Divine Will, without the least murmur or impatience, witnessed his constant sense of the fitness and propriety of all the ways of Providence; how afflictive soever the dispensations, still his piety breathed out, "Not my will but thine be done, oh my God." Wherever he went, the genuine spirit of religion went with him; an unfeigned concern for the glory of God, the honour of religion, and the happiness of mankind; a solicitude for the advancement of knowledge and virtue still gave life, vigour, and importance to his conversation, whether associated with the Publican or the Pharisee. In the courts of profaneness his virtue was not relaxed, nor his piety discouraged. Vice he constantly reprov'd,

reproved, whether disguised in the venerable habit of a priest, or appearing more openly in more unguarded forms. The generous, unbiassed Reformer of mankind, giving them the living lecture of the most upright and uniform conduct; passions restrained by reason; dispositions formed for virtue; a heart informed by candour, directed by the highest justice, and warmed with a benevolence the most extensive and pure; not soured by national prejudices, or contracted by selfish views, but diffused towards every creature, and active towards every object of distress. But what crowned the whole, and rendered his character complete and amiable, was, that sincere, that reasonable humility and meekness, that lowliness of heart, so evident through the whole tenor of his life. He humbled himself in the dust. He condescended to be the companion of the poor of the earth, the friend, the servant of the meanest of the people, if their hearts were warmed with virtue, and their souls enobled by religion.

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Of this we have an useful example in the chapter from which our text is taken. Not that our humility should wear exactly the same form, but that it should always be reasonable, and springing from some useful and beneficent designs. Washing the feet of their guests in the sultry climes of Judea was not a mere act of complaisance, but of hospitality and kindness: so that our Saviour, while he exemplified one virtue, plainly inferred another. "Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" Warmed with love and reverence for his great Master, he forbids him the servile employ: "But Jesus answered, What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." At present thou dost not perceive the reason of my conduct; this seems to thee a too great exertion of humility; but when thou art farther taught in the knowledge of the truth, and hast imbibed more of the true spirit of my religion, thou wilt perceive the reasonableness and propriety of what I now do.

But he who never let pass any occurrence without inferring some useful lesson of instruction, in order to widen the field of knowledge and instill the gospel principles of virtue into the minds of his hearers, could not fail to improve this before us. After he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, he said unto them, "Know, ye, what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am." If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought to wash one another's feet. If I have humbled myself to you, ye ought to be humble to each other. If I have to you displayed the office of a servant and a friend, learn hence how you ought to conduct yourselves to each other. "For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done unto you." — Shall the Christ of God; he to whom a long succession of prophets bore witness, at whose word the sick and the lame were healed, and who was, and is, delegated Lord of Nature; shall he in whom more than the perfections of angels centred, shew himself so kind and so humble;

humble; and shall creatures, full of frailties and follies, dare refuse to each other the tender, the humble offices of humanity? No: rather let us “learn of him who was meek and lowly in spirit, and we shall find rest to our souls.” A rest from the anxieties of pride, the violence of unlawful desires, the remorse of conscience, and the reproach of injured reason.

Long had human nature wandered in the dark paths of ignorance, folly, and transgression; while the candle of the Lord, designed to enlighten the bewildered traveller to the ways of rectitude and life, to brighten the dark passages of moral being, was involved in clouds of superstition, and rendered useless by the early prepossessions of a vicious education. — Philosophy had indeed spun the fine web of speculation and sophistry. The Stoic had almost destroyed the finer affections of the soul, and triumphed over the ruins of the man. A sympathizing tenderness, a disinterested humanity, an extensive benevolence, and a generous forgiveness of injuries, were excluded the list

of virtues; and in a great measure extinguished in the human breast humanity; that source of nameless good offices had given way to the haughtiness of pride. Integrity, so indispensable a part in the character of a good man, was become a very inconvenient qualification, when hypocrisy, and an universal breach of faith prevailed in every rank of the people. — The religion of an oath was brought into contempt, from the example of numbers; and almost every principle of real religion was absorbed by superstition, or ridiculed by vice. — Their wise men, indeed, delivered from their cloisters the most admirable sentiments with regard to the conduct of life; but, in general, they were carried to a pitch of refinement too high to be relished or understood by the greatest part of mankind. They drew a fine picture of virtue; but they themselves only admired it at an awful distance. Wanting either honesty or courage, they gave their sanction to idolatry, and sacrificed at the altars of superstition. And even Socrates the wise, Socrates the good, the pride and ornament of the Heathen world, while

while led to execution by the hands of bigotry and faction; oh! stain to human nature! as it were, departed life in the very act of idolatry. But the blessed Author of our religion, perfectly acquainted with the eternal laws of righteousness, as well as with the nature, principles, and passions of the human mind, sometimes in dark sayings, and at other times in the plainness of truth, hath given the world a perfect rule of conduct, and fixed the boundaries of moral action. He corrects our errors, clears our doubts, satisfies our scruples, and gives to virtue the force of law. But not satisfied with pointing out the way of salvation, he trod it himself, and exhibited a living picture of every thing great and good. While he bids us be humble, humane, just, candid, obedient, and devout, he exemplifies all these amiable perfections in his own conduct.

“Virtue in a finished description may appear like a fine picture of a character which never really existed, and which one might wish and pant after, rather than hope to obtain; but our notions are corrected when we find, in

any one person, the life and actions corresponding to the amiable picture, and even exceeding it. Such an instance shews that the noblest virtue is possible. It works upon every spring of action; it reproves our sloth and indolence, fires our emulation, quickens our desires to excel, and inspires us with an animating hope of success: so mighty and invigorating is the force of a proper example, and great in proportion is the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father in providing one for us so suitable, and at the same time so perfect. In preference to all that could be found in heaven, or upon earth, God determined upon sending his son, his express image, clothed with a human body, and endued with the infirmities, appetites, affections, and passions of our nature, sin only excepted; that when he had instructed us by his doctrine, and laid before us the most divine counsels and precepts, he might also allure us to the practice of piety and virtue, by his own engaging example.*

The God of Heaven might have blessed mankind with the knowledge of the truth some other

other way. The terms of grace might have been taught them by particular revelations, or in characters which might have been understood by all languages and tribes of people. They might have been imprinted on the wide-spreading firmament. But Infinite Wisdom chose another method, a method which reason and candour must acknowledge to be best and most effectual. He sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh; with full credentials of divine commission; who, by an unwearied attention to the duties of religion, manifested to what an exalted pitch virtue may be carried, even in the lowest and most distressful circumstances; and giving us an example, that we should do as he has done unto us. And here let us examine what Christ hath done for us. It is an enquiry well worth the attention of Christians. We shall here pass by the particular act of humility which occasioned these words, and examine in general what he has done for us, and how far he is our example.

Ever since the creation of the world, his delight was with the children of men; he beheld

the virtuous and good, in every age and clime, with eyes of friendship and love; and the wicked with pity and compassion. As the angel of the covenant, he attended the ancient patriarchs; nor do I ever find that he came upon any other embassy than that of love. But when the fulness of time came, that period, marked in the records of Heaven for the promulgation of the gospel, in obedience to the will of the Father, he left the bosom of his God, and was introduced to humanity, not in the palaces of the great, but in circumstances of humility and distress. But Heaven smiled propitious on his birth; and a croud of heavenly inhabitants hailed him to the vale of tears and affliction. If grandeur smiled not on his humble birth, innocence was there; and the virtuous parent, with tears of piety, received him to her arms, and nursed him with a mother's fondness. As he grew up, he unfolded the mystery of Providence by degrees; regularly and gently displayed the nature of his divine commission; and by a series of undoubted miracles, proved that he came from
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God; that he came upon the most important errand, to teach mankind due notions of God, and rational ideas of his moral kingdom; to raise them to the lost innocence and purity of their natures, and to reconcile a sinful world to their offended God. He published, upon a variety of occasions, the most divine counsels, precepts, and doctrines, which at last were built up to a complete system of the most refined and heavenly religion. Animated with the spirit of divine benevolence and philanthropy; with the most assiduous and indefatigable industry, to overcome the prejudices of mankind, to clear the human mind of corrupt notions and depraved appetites, and to teach and justify the ways of God to man. But while he was employed in the laborious task of reforming the world, he exercised the strictest simplicity of manners, an unaffected humility and devotion, sat on his amiable countenance; while integrity and truth attended all his professions and actions. His days, not spent in the courts of idleness or dissipation, but in the service of mankind; while

while the multitude, that would have crowned him King of Israel, and placed him on the throne of David, amidst magnificence and pomp; while empires proffered him the blaze of power, the charms of ease, and the delicacies of luxury; he chose rather to dwell among the poor of the earth, and employed his time in the nobler purposes of clearing the intellectual eye from the mist of prejudice; putting down the strong holds of Satan, and erecting a kingdom which consisted in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But by such a disinterested conduct, what want of the good things of this world did the son of God submit to; or rather, what did he not hazard? what did he actually forfeit by it? Every thing that the man of the world calls dear. His days were spent in labour and fatigue, his fare coarse, and hard his couch. While pride dwelt secure beneath the roofs of elegance, and rioted in ill-managed merriment, he was exposed to the inclement air. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the son of man had not where to lay his head.

head. Yet his contentment and patience smoothed the ruggedness of life. Piety bowed submissive to the will of Heaven. His integrity, his love of truth, unshaken and sincere, bore the cavils of ignorance, and the storm of persecution raised against him; till having led a life of the most exemplary and striking virtue, adorned with all the graces of humanity, benevolence, justice, piety, and truth, he fell a sacrifice to the rage of bigotry, a sacrifice to the cause of truth and religion, and thereby finished the great scheme of human redemption; dying, as he had lived, with the most entire submission to the will of Heaven; breathing forgiveness and peace to mankind; and leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.

And here, then, let it be observed, that his obedience to his earthly parents, so far as it did not interfere with the more important offices of a Saviour, was sincere and affectionate. As a member of society, he was peaceable and just, perfectly submissive to all its laws: in short, he “ rendered unto Cæsar the things that

that were Cæsar's, and to God, the things that were God's. As a man, he maintained the strictest and most amiable friendship. As a moral being, his passions were all restrained by reason, and softened into virtue. He made religion the great end and aim of all his actions.

Whether we trace his character in public or in private, the same uniform and steady goodness adorned him every where. If we follow him into the temple, there we behold him full of honest zeal for the glory of God, when he perceived the holy place profaned by avarice and extortion, and converted from a house of prayer into a den of thieves. Or if we attend him, as assembled in private with his disciples; there, with the most engaging humility, he descends to the lowest, kindest offices of friendship; satisfying their scruples, answering their honest enquiries, and rearing them up, by degrees, for the important offices of the heralds of salvation, the teachers of the gospel doctrines. Viewing him, then, as a subject of the kingdom

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dom of Heaven, as a member of an earthly community, as a son, a brother, or a friend; as submissive to the will of God, obedient to the laws of his country, an affectionate son, a tender brother, and a true and constant friend; as unconquerably determined to the paths of righteousness and truth; as sovereign over the world, and yet with the most engaging humility, condescending to earn his bread by his industry; as maintaining his integrity even unto death; as forgiving his enemies on the cross, and being patiently resigned to the appointments of God: — Surely these are virtues that lie within the reach of every one of us. Cannot we follow so bright an example? Cannot we emulate the virtues so conspicuous in the character of our great Leader? Cannot we maintain an unshaken integrity in every scene of life? Cannot we pity and compassionate the poor, and shew some tenderness towards every object of distress, though Providence may not have put it in our power to distribute bread to the hungry, and raiment to those that want clothing? This is truly Christian charity. May we

we not say, with Peter, "Silver and gold have I none," but thou hast my tear of sympathy; all that I can is to condole in thy afflictions.

If in this manner we serve God; if the precepts of religion are thus effectual, we may be said to do to each other as Christ has done unto us; we are entitled to all those present and future blessings which are promised to all his true and faithful followers.

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S E R M O N X.

ISAIAH I. 16, 17.

Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

THESE are the sacrifices God requires of men; these are the offerings most worthy of a benevolent, good, and perfect Being to receive; and most consistent with the nature of a rational creature to pay. — Then to what purpose are all solemn, pompous ceremonies; — or of what effect can a specious, gloomy

gloomy appearance of sorrow and remorse for sin be with God, *who dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; and who loveth truth and purity in the inward parts ;* what effect can all this have, when the man still continues in his iniquity and immersed in luxury, pride, covetousness, and impurity ; can all these splendid appearances dazzle the eyes of the Judge of the whole earth ? To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the Lord : I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me. — Your new moons, your appointed feasts, my soul hateth ; they are a trouble to me ; I am weary to bear them. When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear ; your hands are full of blood. God requires the man to consecrate himself into a temple and habitation of God's spirit, to sanctify the heart unto a pure and worthy altar ; demands
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the immediate attendance of our noblest powers, as the sacred ministers that are to bring all our offerings to him; calls for the exercise of the best and devoutest affections to accompany us to the throne of grace; points out in the text the sacrifices we are to present; those spiritual and truly noble ones of prayer and praise, of broken and contrite hearts, humility of spirit, righteousness, benevolence, and charity. Wash ye, make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; and then, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Here let us consider what transgressions were expiated by sacrifices and burnt offerings under the Jewish dispensation.

Sin, or moral turpitude, the pollution of the heart and soul, could not possibly be washed away. They must, therefore, be offences against the ceremonial law; a contempt, or neglect

neglect of the rights and institutions of it. The blood of bullocks, of lambs, and he-goats, were not proportioned, and therefore could not possibly make any satisfaction for a breach of the great law of righteousness and virtue. — It must therefore be a suitable sense of sin, a humiliation of soul, and a steady resolution of reformation of life, that can procure pardon and remission for sins; and without that, there is not the least hope for us to avoid the wrath to come, and the just condemnation of iniquity; for it is impossible that the death of any innocent creature should satisfy justice, or take away the punishment due to the guilty; — for the very essence of justice consists in rendering to every one his due; and therefore, (as an ingenious author observes,) it can never be satisfied by the innocent receiving the punishment of the guilty; because in so doing, it would admit of that which is directly contrary to its very essence, rectitude, or an equitable rendering of their due to every one; for in the innocent suffering for the guilty, they suffer what, in justice, they ought not to do; and

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the guilty are excused, which is contrary to justice: and the suffering, or death of any creature stand instead of minding and doing whatsoever things are honest, just, lovely, virtuous, and praise-worthy. Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in seeing his commands obeyed? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; pure religion, and undefiled before God, is this: *To visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world.* Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.

The voice of reason, of conscience, the express declaration of scripture teach us, that splendid offerings, costly sacrifices, or all the solemnity of external worship, will be of no manner of advantage, if our moral characters be evil, if they be separated from the practice of true holiness and virtue in our lives. It is strange how mankind can delude themselves so far as to think that outward shew will serve instead of piety towards God and charity

to men. How does the prophet in this case reprove the Jews for trusting to a zealous profession and external appearance of obedience; such as sacrifices, keeping the new moons and sabbaths, while they neglected the moral precepts of the law, and their hands were full of blood. This is the character of a vast number of God's ancient people, the Jews; and how faithfully do we see a great number of Christians follow their example, departing from that simplicity of worship and substantial holiness enjoined in the gospel, making religion consist in empty forms and unmeaning ceremonies; thinking it enough for them, like the Pharisees in the time of our Saviour, to appear in the temple at the appointed and stated hours of devotion: while a great many others in our own days have nothing to support their pretensions to the name and characters of Christians, than a strong attachment to some particular doctrine, which, though not found in the gospel, they yet fasten upon it. These are the persons who trust to a form of godliness, but deny the power of it, naming the name of Christ

Christ without departing from iniquity; are very scrupulous in all external forms of religion, whilst the fruits of righteousness, temperance and charity do not appear in their lives. It is true the externals of Christianity must be observed, but the internals; the religion of the heart must not be neglected. Outward forms are no otherwise useful but as they have a tendency to make us better, to countenance virtue, and to support the belief of God, and our dependence upon him. But if these have not their proper and designed effects, they are no farther useful. What signifies restraining from labour and secular employments on the Lord's day, if we do not appear before the Lord; and shall it profit us to come under the ministry of the word, if we receive no edification; that is, if our exercises there do not make us better and wiser men. We had better continue at home, we only mock God, and thereby increase our condemnation. If we confess our sins, make public declaration of our hatred to all manner of impiety, and put up

solemn petitions to the Almighty for his assistance to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and still continue the same rebellious subjects; and make no efforts of our own to break off from our sins, by the practice of righteousness; we shall justly receive the same doom with those who appear before the throne; saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works? then will he profess I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. The whole tenor of the gospel shews us, that without piety towards God, and benevolence to men, the most splendid profession will not qualify us for the happiness of Heaven: the gospel is a law, and designed not only to regulate the external actions of men, but the inward purposes and dispositions of the heart. It requires obedience, that is, requires us to practice all virtue and charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience. If we entertain right notions of the Deity, if we regard him as we ought to do, as a Being in-

infinitely wise, perfectly righteous and good; we can never imagine that he can possibly be pleased with outward professions instead of a holy and virtuous conduct; that the most holy being can be satisfied with formal acts of homage, contradicted by vicious practices; nay, the very profession itself will be discredited and stripped of all its virtue. It is an inexcusable hypocrisy and dissimulation, which the very first principles of religion teach us to guard against; and the hearts of men must necessarily tell them, that it is contrary to the will of God. Our Saviour, in the parable, Matthew xxi. 28. exposes the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, by a man who had two sons; to the first he said, son, go work to day in my vineyard; at first he refused, but afterwards repented and went. The second seemed all reverence and submission to his father, but neglected to obey him. Our Lord asked them which was the best of the two? he, who said he would not, but afterwards repented; or he who, under a disguise of religious profes-

sion continued in his disobedience to his father? Do you not see that he can do no more?

We should, therefore, endeavour to discharge ourselves of all vicious habits, purify our hearts from all corrupt affections, and cleanse our lives of all wicked practices. It is our indispensable duty, not to appear, but to be really virtuous; not like the Jews of old, to be very minute, in matters of no moment or importance, while we indulge ourselves in habitual and heinous vices; in pride, covetousness, and oppression: for we may depend upon it as an infallible truth, that the sovereign ruler of the world, whose proceedings are all according to the exactest rules of equity and justice, will, in the distribution of rewards and punishments, be determined, not according to outward show, or appearances, but according to our real intrinsic characters. A gloomy, religious outside may impose on our fellow creatures; but God sees the heart, observes the secret springs of our actions, and the principles by which

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we are moved; he sees the hypocrite, like a painted sepulchre, all white without, but within, full of rottenness and corruption; he sees him put on a serious, formal, ostentatious air, and under the cloak of virtue, harbour rancour, malice, envy, covetousness, pride, injustice, and all those marks which denominate him of his father the devil. A person insincere in his professions, is always acting against nature, still imposing on others, and imposing on himself. In public, his life is a load to him; he finds it necessary to support his pretended character, and to keep the world in ignorance of what he is in reality; he is obliged to *set a watch before his mouth, and keep the door of his lips*, lest his tongue should betray the inward workings of his heart; but when he has withdrawn from the world, into privacy and retirement, there he gives a loose to his sinful desires and inclinations; for it is a certain, but melancholy truth, that thousands act their part with great applause on the public theatre of the world, but would not for

a great deal, that any should know what they
act behind the scenes, when concealed by the
curtains of night or privacy; not considering
that they are still in the presence of that Being,
before whom all nature lies unveiled; for there
is no darkness, nor shadow of death where the
workers of iniquity may hide themselves, Job
xxxiv. 22.

A hypocrite, sure, is the most detestable of
all characters; and, therefore, the scripture
saith, that he shall have his portion in the lake
which burneth with fire and brimstone, which
is the second death.

Let us, therefore, comply with the exhorta-
tion in the text; wash ye, make you clean,
put away the evil of your doings from before
mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well,
seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the
fatherless, plead for the widow.

Let us endeavour in all our actions to approve
ourselves to God as dear children, to be holy
in our measure and degree, as he is infinitely
holy.

If we believe his amiable excellencies, and have an esteem and reverence for him, we must be persuaded it is very desiræable, nay the greatest perfection and happiness, our natures are capable of, is to imitate his moral perfections; and the reflection, that we are guiding ourselves by the rule he has given, that our actions, agreeable and well pleasing, must be the height of enjoyment, and most worthy our pursuit. Any one that considers the relation we bear to him, that we are his creatures, the subjects of his government, the constant beneficiaries of his providence, continually supported and preserved by him, must necessarily acknowledge, that reverence, love, fear, trust, submission, and obedience, are due to him: what devotion, what gratitude, must such a consideration inspire in an attentive mind! but as he is infinitely above being benefited by any of our good offices; the principal return he requires is, that we should exercise some similitude of that mercy and compassion he has shewn to us, to our fellow creatures;

creatures; by relieving the oppressed, judging the fatherless, and pleading for the widow. This is clearly enforced in the text; and the New Testament is full of earnest exhortations to brotherly love and charity; and the strongest arguments are made use of to enforce them. Nay the light of nature makes compassion a strong indispensable duty. There is such an instinct of benevolence planted in our natures, which scarcely the most powerful habits of wickedness can overcome. The human heart melts with pity, when a miserable object is presented to it. A man offers violence to himself, when he shuts up his bowels, and hardens his heart from relieving the distressed, and assisting human nature in misery: and what bitter reproaches of conscience does he feel; but what a pleasing, substantial happiness must he feel arising in his mind? what a solid self-approving and lasting joy, which infinitely exceeds all sensual gratifications, when he has freely and cheerfully made use of his power and wealth; and the opportunities given him
for

for doing good, and imparting comfort and relief to the distressed. The greater his abilities of diffusing the effects of his benevolence, by assisting multitudes of his fellow creatures in misery, the greater the pleasure and satisfaction; he will be more able to resemble his maker, whose happiness it is to communicate good. Of what real service can the largest possessions be to that man, whose whole pleasure consists, as Solomon says, in beholding them with his eyes? Mean enjoyment! he will have a dreadful reckoning at the great day of account. He cannot say, with Job xxix. 12. I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. There is not any foundation on which we may with greater confidence assure ourselves before God, and raise others up in all the changes of fortune, than benevolence, and charity; these are works which will bear a review with the greatest pleasure: these are works

works which will confirm our title to the heavenly habitations.

Let us endeavour, henceforth, by the assistance of God, to cultivate all religious and good dispositions, adding to our belief of Christianity, all virtues recommended there; without this, we can have no hope that God will forgive us. To come before him with rams, and with oil, and the fruit of the body, to atone for sins, will not do.

The most pompous professions of religion, the greatest zeal for the truth of any of the doctrines of the gospel: the most solemn and regular performance of instituted services, will not recommend us at the judgment seat of Christ, unless these have had their good effects upon our lives, and shewn themselves in sincerity towards God, and benevolence to our fellow creatures. We are instructed in scripture to do what is morally good, as the only means of happiness and peace; to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God; to abound in knowledge and judgment, being

being sincere and without offence. That pure religion is, to do acts of benevolence and compassion, and to keep one's self undefiled, and unspotted by the snares and temptations of the world.

S E R M O N XI.

G E N E S I S XVIII.

That he far from since he do after this manner to
 they the righteous with the wicked and that the
 righteous should be as the wicked that he far
 from the shall not the judge of all the earth do
 right.

every one a companion of mankind
 in order to support a wife and happy pla
SERMON
 of government; it is necessary not only that
 justice should lay the foundation, in order to
 rear the pleasing legions of angels hap
 piness.

being sincere and without effort. That pure religion is, to do acts of benevolence and com-
passion, and to keep one's self collected, and
unperturbed by the snare and temptations of the
world.

S E R M O N XI.

without this, we have no hope that God
will forgive us. To come before him with
guilt, that will not, and the first of our duties
is to repent.

GENESIS XVIII. 25.

That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous, should be as the wicked that be far from thee: shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

IN every public combination of mankind, in order to support a wise and happy plan of government; it is necessary, not only that justice should lay the foundation, in order to rear the pleasing superstructure of human happiness;

piness; but also, that each individual should invariably act with a view to the good of the whole, and not merely for the gratification of his own private ends, and the calls of interest or ambition, as detached from the rest of the society: that is, he should act from the principles of integrity, justice, honour, and benevolence. This is necessary, in order to support public and private trust, and to produce the general good of the whole.

But some through ignorance, and others through a wilful depravity, may run eccentric from their duty, and destroy the peace and harmony of society.

It is necessary, therefore, that the duty of each individual should be fairly stated; that laws should be formed, and the boundaries of action be fixed; and that these laws should be well supported with suitable motives and sanctions, rewards, and punishments, to deter the bold transgressor, and animate the obedient and virtuous subject.

But sometimes in the government of mankind, it will be found necessary to relax a little from the severity of law; to mingle mercy with justice; and bid the fettered criminal arise to liberty and life.

These observations, as they are drawn from the universal sense and practice of mankind, have their foundation in reason, in equity and goodness. It is true they depend upon circumstances; but under these circumstances they are always binding and fit.

With these leading principles to direct us, we may argue into the moral government of the universe, whose king and judge is God, and from hence form some conceptions of the Divine Providence; sentiments very useful in the direction of our conduct through life.

Let us then conceive all nations, tribes, and languages of people connected in one vast body or kingdom, under the same laws, subject to the same penalties and entitled to the same privileges; and for the regulation of this multitude, to support the honour of government as well as to preserve the peace and happiness

happiness of the whole, it is necessary that laws should be enacted, and attended with powerful and vigorous execution; and not that the lives and properties of millions should depend on the uncertain humour or caprice of a single person. It is necessary that the disturbers of public happiness, the violaters of justice, the hardened and accustomed transgressor, should be dragged forth to public infamy and punishment; as well as to single out the upright patriot, the lover of his country, and the lover of mankind, and distinguish him with public honors and rewards.

Is this regulation *wise, just, reasonable*, and productive of innumerable benefits to society? The *Infidel*, then, as well as the Antinomian Christian, must acknowledge, that the great Judge and King of heaven and earth, has not only a right to give laws to his people; but has also an undoubted right to punish or reward: and to distribute his favors, only to his faithful and obedient subjects: this alone, being the means to preserve the honour of his laws as well as to render them effectual.

He has also a right, without incurring the imputation of injustice, or unrighteousness, to forgive the sinner, to pardon the delinquent; and sometimes it will be found absolutely necessary to involve a whole community, the righteous with the unrighteous in one general temporal desolation.

The hand of Providence, is indeed sometimes stretched forth for the temporal salvation of his people. Sometimes in the midst of slaughter the virtuous man escapes. And while famine depopulate a land, plenty has been found beneath the roofs of hospitality: the widow of Sarepta enjoyed the necessaries of life, when the princes of the people were perishing with hunger. The righteous Lot was snatched from impending ruin, when the wicked were left to perish with a horrible tempest,

But this is not always the case; we have seen the righteous and his seed, begging bread: and the good man is as liable to be crushed by the fall of a tower, or be blasted by the forked lightning as the wicked.

When

When the knowledge of the true God was more confined, the interpositions of Providence, in favour of the righteous were more frequent. Moses was saved by the hand of his enemy. Joseph, as a reward for his virtues, was raised from a dungeon and placed next a throne. Heaven, to encourage a firm and steady adherence to the principles of true religion, shut the mouths of the lions that they hurted not his servant Daniel. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, though cast into a fiery furnace, survived by the peculiar interposition of Providence. But these were the ages of miracles. The Deity may be said here to depart from his general plan of government for general good, but no analogy can or ought to be drawn from those to the present times,

The patriarch, Abraham, informed by the Lord of the approaching fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the most amiable tenderness and humanity, intercedes for them with Heaven. " And Abraham stood before the Lord, and said, wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? wilt thou involve them alike

in common desolation? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

The righteous patriarch, notwithstanding he was blessed with revelations from Heaven, had, when compared with the least in the kingdom of Heaven, *i. e.* a Christian, but narrow comprehensions of the methods of divine government, in the management of the world. He thought it inconsistent with the attributes of divine rectitude, to mingle the righteous with the wicked in the fate of Sodom. "Far be it from thee (saith this devout sage) to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked." The friends of Job laboured under the same mistake, they thought it contrary to the idea of Divine Goodness to suffer a temporal evil to afflict the good man. Not knowing that this world is not a scene of retribution, or that it is in a future state, that all men are to receive according to their works. But I shall pass over the expostulations

tions in the first part of the text, regarding them as the overflowings of humanity, untaught in the various ways of God, and proceed to examine more minutely that noble sentiment of reason and religion, viz. *shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

This is as important an enquiry as can possibly exercise the human mind: truths of the greatest consequence, with regard to the conduct of moral life, will flow from an impartial examination of this doctrine of our religion. Our virtue, and our happiness, depend upon a just decision; it is necessary, therefore, that a love of truth, candor, and reason, should inspire us while we pursue this important disquisition. “ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? In treating farther on these words, I shall enquire;

1st. What is to be understood by doing right?

2dly. Whether the great God, the judge of heaven and earth always does right, both with regard to his moral government, and the dispensation of his laws.

Let it be first premised, with regard to the conduct of the Deity, we are not sufficiently acquainted with the ways of his providence to be proper judges, only we may argue from what we see of his moral government.

1st. What is to be understood by doing right?

I answer in a few words; *acting consistent with the eternal laws of reason, justice, mercy, and goodness.* The obligation to moral action, depends upon innumerable circumstances; but then while certain circumstances exist, certain actions are always binding and fit; a strict compliance with those obligations, and an inviolable regard to our circumstances, and the actions dependent upon them, is what we call doing right.

But with regard to us, piety towards God, humility, self-denial and benevolence, or Christian charity, are duties which do not vary in any circumstances, but are of a fixed and unalterable nature. But these are not applicable to the Deity. In all the various circumstances of his creatures; it is necessary the great First Cause should act agreeable to the eternal laws

laws of justice and goodness. And while he makes these original laws of nature the rules of his own conduct, he cannot grant a dispensation for us to break through them; for while justice and reason are the foundation of the divine laws; while they spring from the eternal fitness of things, it must always be wrong to run counter to them. And, indeed, if they entirely depended upon circumstances existing, no being can grant a dispensation to violate them, and at the same time act right. Suppose an earthly prince was to indulge a few favourites in all the various courses of licentiousness; dispense with their obedience to the laws; and while, with consent, they violated the established constitutions of the state, oppressed the weak, harassed the rich, perverted justice, and interrupted the current of social happiness; would we acknowledge the righteousness of such an administration; or rather, would not every individual be ready to curse the king in his heart?

Oh! charge not the God of Heaven with injustice, or a perversion of the rule of right.

Attribute

Attribute no actions to the Divinity which would be infamous, even in a man. Shall not that Being, by whose energy every thing that is, was called into existence? shall not the Judge of the whole earth act righteously? shall he not do what is right and fitting?

This brings me to the second thing proposed, to enquire, whether the great Judge of the whole earth does right, both with regard to his moral government, and the dispensation of his laws?

It will be frequently found importantly useful, to vary our objects of enquiry. Sometimes to examine the evidences, and peculiar doctrines of Christianity; and at other times to follow the footsteps of Divine Providence, and trace the actions of the Supreme Ruler in the government of the world of reasonable beings. The last, as it brings us acquainted with God and his attributes, will enlarge our minds, divest us of little prejudices, and open the most extensive field of knowledge and truth. Without a just conception of the nature and perfections of the Divinity; im-

posture

posture may pass with us for the undoubted truths of God, and vice wear the appearance of reason and religion. And,

1st. That mixture of sin and sorrow, that variety of moral and natural evil, perceivable in this world, have been made objections to the supposition of a just, good, and righteous moral government. The unequal distribution of good and evil; the sufferings of the virtuous, and the triumph and enjoyments of the vicious, have frequently proved stumbling-blocks to the weak, while vice has raised upon it the trophies of infidelity. Why helpless infant innocence, “often languishes under diseases which are derived from a parent, and a parent suffers yet keener anguish from the rebellious ingratitude of a child: why the tenderest affection is often abused by the neglect of indifference, or the insults of brutality; and why vice has external advantages put in her power, which virtue is compelled to renounce?” Why does not God stretch forth his arm to save the righteous when dangers threaten, when famine, pestilence, or war de-

olate

solate a people; why see we not the winged messengers of Heaven, frequently loosen the chains of the righteous, and unbar the iron gates of the prison to bid the oppressed good man breathe the sweets of liberty; or why is not each conscious liar, like Saphira of old, struck dead, or the cruel persecutor warned by a voice from above? * For great, extensive, and general good, Heaven *has* departed from its general plan: miracles have testified the power as well as the moral government of God;

* ————— When the power

Who form'd him, marks declining virtue loose,
On folly's verge, and tottering to a fall;
Should he then snatch him from th' impending ill,
Shall man impeach his justice?

————— Know if the good
Thro' life should suffer; in that scanty span
Are all his woes compris'd. If vice exult,
That span contains its happiness —————

————— Hence the tear
On pity's kindling cheek, that speaks the man,
Tho' weak, yet virtuous; noble in the deed
That marks his imperfection. As a man
He feels, he weeps where the superior power
Would triumph. —————

God; but it would be acting contrary to all the rules of right, to be daily interposing in this exemplary manner; all order would immediately cease, virtue would be no more; the passion of fear would overcome every principle of humanity, and in the end effectually destroy our moral agency.

S E R M O N

God; but it would be adding copy to all
the tales of things to be daily repeating in

~~this exemplary manner, all of which would make~~

directly cease, virtue would be no more; the

portion of it would overcome every thing

the

S E R M O N XII.

ECCLESIASTES IX. 11.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither; yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

FROM our narrow, imperfect, and limited view of things, we are apt, after a transient survey of human nature, from the seemingly mixed and confused administration of things in this world, to conclude that this melancholy description of life, is literally true. With pain
and

and anxiety of mind we behold, in a thousand remarkable instances, that the race is not to the swift, &c. From hence we are ready to argue, that there is no God that takes cognizance of the affairs of men: and that all is governed either by blind chance, or partial undiscerning necessity, that whatever be the merits of a person, whatever his worth and integrity, he may for ever pine in want and obscurity, while another who takes no care to improve himself in useful knowledge, and however unfit, is called upon to enjoy places of profit, trust, and honour. How often have we seen a man set out in life with the fairest, and most plausible pretences to rise to wealth and reputation, with all the requisite qualifications to shine in his rank and station; yet by some unforeseen blow cruelly cast down, deprived of his hopes by some obstacle or other, which neither understanding or skill shall be able to surmount. On the other hand, have we not seen those, whose lot seemed to be determined for drudgery and pain, laying hold of a fit conjuncture, which through the fluctuating uncertainty

uncertainty of human life, might never offer itself again? We have seen the prospect brighten before them, and those chains of difficulties which seemed to threaten them, entirely removed. A series of uninterrupted successes shall lead to the pinnacles of honour and wealth, while the trump of Fame calls it the effect of prudence and skill, when perhaps it had cost him not so much as the pain of thinking.

This is not only the case with individuals, but it fares alike with kingdoms, whose lucky accidents, and favourable conjunctures, opened the way to victory and wealth, which the most sound and refined policy could not effect. A superficial view of such scenes as these have caused many to infer, that Providence stood neuter; nay, what is worse, a great many from observing how much share mere chance and casualty had in the disposal of things against every principle of reason, argued themselves out of the belief of God's existence and universal superintendence. We are not capable of tracing the steps and measures, the Almighty

mighty takes in the government of the world, and in carrying on the happiness of the universe. What, because we are not capable of understanding the reason and design of the Infinite Mind, must we alledge there is no reason or design in them, or must we censure the ways of Heaven, because we cannot perceive their propriety? or, ought the righteous and good to repine, because the wicked are set upon high places, when he sees their end is shame and destruction? the different fates that attend the lives of mankind; the seeming irregularity in the government of the world, in itself proves the being of God, and that his providence is concerned to bring about what comes to pass. If this was not the case, if a superior intelligent power did not sometimes baffle our hopes, and over-rule events, I am apt to think, that every thing would fall out according to the course of nature; that is produce its natural effect without any variation, and our designs and hopes would be always answered according to the means we made use of to bring them about. But the observa-

tion and experience of every day proves this is not the case, and the wise man who had deeply studied human nature and the actions of men, and critically examined their consequences, asserts with much truth, the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, &c. Though it is but natural to conclude otherwise. It seems suitable that the best contrivances should be attended with the best success that men of learning, worth, and integrity, should make their way in the world before the fool, and him that has no understanding. But since, in daily instances, we find events fall out contrary to all appearance and probability, we may with reason and justice conclude, that there is an Almighty invisible Being that over rules the actions of men, and makes them serve some wise, and good purpose, for the general benefit of that great family that is under his care and inspection: and without doubt this is to be a standing proof of his providence; to engage the consideration and dependence of his creatures upon him for the success of their best endeavours,

and to prevent them from having recourse to vicious stratagems to accomplish their desires. The word chance, has long ago been proved to be without any meaning, and it is even impossible to affix any idea to it; if we consider that the Creator of the world, is a being of almighty power and influence, of unerring and fathomless wisdom, that at one view comprehends all the possibilities of things; and that nothing in any part of the universe can fall out without his knowledge or permission. There are many events that befall us: but we take no time to reflect on the series of concurring circumstances that brought them about. We are therefore apt to attribute them to chance, partly because they do not fall out agreeable to our expectations, and partly because we do not look back upon some false steps we have taken. But the joint efforts of wisdom and prudence are disappointed, when at the same time, the cause is not, and cannot be known. It would be impious to call them chance, for they are pure designs; things invisible to us are all the Lord's,

from whom the powers of nature are derived; which just view of things made the great Addison observe, that "The ways of Heaven are dark and intricate, puzzled in mazes, and perplexed in errors, our understanding traces them in vain; lost and bewildered in the fruitless search, nor sees with how much art the windings run, nor where the regular confusion ends." It is he holds the reins of the universe, and steers the course of all nature; he can turn the hearts and desires of his creatures, or cause their passions and vicious conduct to fulfil his righteousness, or bring about the purposes of his providence. He has the hearts of monarchs in his hands; though he suffers them often to take their course; to give loose to their cruelty and ambition, and to work all manner of wickedness with greediness. Let a man, for instance, reflect on the causes that brought about the reformation in our country. When the whole nation groaned under the yoke of oppression, popery, superstition, and the tyranny of the priests; when the king and the people, notwithstanding, were unanimous,

unanimous, as to the truths of that religion; the one for his zeal for the propagation and establishment of it, honoured with the title of *Defender of the Faith*; the others meanly consenting to be drained of all their wealth, their liberty and every thing that can render life desirable: at one instant, as it were, an universal revolt took place from the see of Rome. Let us consider how this great revolution was effected, and we shall find it in a manner, not seemingly very favourable to the cause of piety, virtue, and sound knowledge. That a person, almost entirely devoted to the gratification of his sensual appetites, would ever trouble his head about the purity of Christianity, or the persuasion of his subjects seems very strange. But the Almighty was pleased to make these heinous crimes subservient to his wise purposes. It is equally strange that persons, who by their whole conduct, manifested not the least regard for virtue, honour, and chastity, should thwart the wanton desires of a monarch who seemed stedfast in his purposes; and thus to endanger their influence and interests. But every cir-

cumstance in it confesses the overruling Hand that guides the whole planetary system, as well as the lower concerns of individuals, and made a licentious monarch the instrument of delivering millions from a vassalage more intollerable than ever heathen tyrants imposed; and procured to the inhabitants of Britain those privileges and blessings which the favour of the world procured for all. If, likewise, we consider the manner in which the ancient prophecies were fulfilled, with regard to the place where the Messiah should be born. His parents lived in Nazareth, far from the place where providence designed he should be born. Just before this happy æra took place, Cæsar sent out a decree, that the land of Judea under Herod, being now made a Roman province, should be taxed. In compliance with this edict, Joseph and Mary repaired to Bethlehem, not because it was the city to which Nazareth belonged, but because it was the place where David was born, where all his descendants were commanded to make their appearance. Here the Virgin was delivered of her precious charge,
and

and thus by the course of human events, without any premeditated design of the parents of Christ; the prediction of the prophet was remarkably fulfilled. "That a star should come out of Bethlehem." And thus it is that mankind while they seek only to gratify their own avarice and ambition, become instruments in the hand of Heaven to accomplish the grand counsels of his eternal providence. At first sight it appears only the effect of chance, that Christ should be born there; but if we carefully reflect, we shall find it pure design. It was foretold that he should be born at Bethlehem, the city of David, and so it came to pass, as it were by accidental affairs, but a most wise and gracious design seems to run through the whole. If providence was not concerned, what occasion could there be for such a minute taxing, and ascertaining the strength of the nation in a time of perfect tranquillity and peace? the accomplishment therefore, of things foretold, when accompanied with uncommon circumstances and such as certainly regard the unconstrained

motions of the mind, will evidently prove the Almighty and all-knowing God to interest himself in the affairs of the children of men, and that nothing, how minute soever can fall out, unless directed or permitted by him. From general cases, and such as concern kingdoms, and publick communities of men, we may descend to particulars; as all history is full of instances of this kind, where at first view we are apt to attribute some remarkable affair to mere chance, or fatal necessity; but as we go on, we observe the intricate mazes of Providence, to unfold themselves, till at last the great plan is finished, and we can have a series of regular, wise, and almost invisible causes: then the wisdom and contrivance of every part of the plot is displayed with peculiar lustre; the whole scheme unravelled; and what we regarded as irregular, and the effect of chance, we now see full of beauty, and the most gracious design.

We are tempted to deny the reality of the Divine Providence, when we see the wicked, the professed enemies to all religion and virtue,
advance

advance to wealth, honour, and ease, while the honest, righteous man is often in the forest afflictions and distress. We are apt to say that mankind are not dealt with according to their characters in this world; however, if we consult the history of the upright Job, all our doubts and difficulties will be cleared up. The great Judge himself bears witness to it, that he was a perfect and upright man, one that feared God, and departed from evil; that is, he was sincerely virtuous, he never deviated from the commands of God wilfully and deliberately, yet what bitter calamity befell him, to be deprived of every worldly good, and the fond hopes of a parent. One would imagine, if any incident of human life might be called chance, it was surely this; a tempest arose and demolished the buildings that contained his children; that seemingly was nothing but a natural cause. And the Sabeans only acted according to their usual practice, and avowed principles of injustice and robbery, when they deprived him of his cattle. And his friends found it so difficult to reconcile
such

such an unhappy condition to the character of a good, virtuous man, that they charged him with the most odious crime, that of hypocrisy, and exhorted him to repent, with promises of mercy. "Is not thy wickedness great, and thine iniquity infinite? therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee." It was their maxim, that guilt preceded affliction, and that God punished none of his creatures, but when they violated his commands. It is true that the Almighty punishes none of his creatures, but with a view to their good; and Providence brought all this upon Job, with the wisest and most gracious intentions to strengthen him in virtue, to give be an example of resigned piety to all future generations, and perhaps to enflame the devotions of superior beings, who saw such steady and virtuous resolutions in such low circumstances. But though the supreme Governor suffered all these afflictions to befall him, the persons that were necessary to them were not the less criminal; they, as Joseph told his brethren, meant for ill, they
had

had the crime of bad intention, but God permitted it for his good. For though the wise, just, and holy Being overrules the actions of wicked men, and makes them subservient to very good purposes, and holds them as instruments in his hands, yet without invading or infringing their freedom of action, he causes their passions and desires to bring about some salutary ends; and works such effects in human affairs, which to us seem accidental, but to him, certain and determined. As in the case of Joseph, who by his brethren was inhumanly sold to be a slave for life; what a series of contingencies afterwards overtook him, which made it appear very unlikely that ever he should be a partner of a throne, or govern and preserve the empire where he was sold a bond slave, and subjected to the horrors of a dungeon; or even that the malice and cruelty of his brethren who had made him an helpless exile from his native country, and the careffes of a tender parent, should render him an instrument in the hand of Providence, to keep multitudes alive; or that they should be indebted for their support,

port, in time of famine, to him whom they had maliciously bartered for money. The Almighty, though he did not thwart these events, yet he bent them to the most merciful ends. The providence of God suffered every event to take its course, till his designs were fulfilled and then the contrivance was visible. The benevolent God sent him before them to save many people alive, and to witness to the whole Egyptian empire, who was the only living and true God, when afterward he rescued the Israelites from merciless servitude, and by his mighty arm brought them to the destined Canaan.

Upon the whole then, we assert a providence, not chance, or blind necessity, destructive of human liberty and moral government; a providence which secretly, and uniformly effects the purposes of God; a providence, which by an infinite penetration causes a vast variety of means and instruments to bring about his wise designs, while every order of beings is still left to act suitable to their respective nature and their rank in the creation :
so

so that all circumstances whatever are observed, regulated, and conducted by God, and even those that appear casual, are in reality providential; and what we corruptly call chance is truly Providence.

S E R M O N XIII.

A C T S X. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth and said, of a truth I perceive, that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

IN a discourse on the nature, the extent, and importance of the apostolic commission, I had occasion to observe, that the Jews were under the influence of uncommon prejudice with regard to the national distribution of the Divine favours. They imagined they were the only people on earth who enjoyed the friend-

friendship and peculiar protection of Providence. They looked upon the God of Heaven as partial to their interests, and as despising and rejecting the rest of mankind. Nor have we any reason to suppose, that the Apostles were free from this weakness. The same national prejudices soured their tempers for a while, contracted their views and made the gospel appear as a local and partial dispensation.

The Apostle Peter received from the Lord, the divine commission to preach the gospel to all nations, yet he could not at once emerge from the depth of prejudice, or overcome those narrow conceptions of the Divinity, that were instilled into him, while as yet he was a member of the ancient dispensation. The God of Abraham seemed to him the God of the Jews alone; the Messiah, the king of Israel, and the dispenser of truth, of judgment, and of salvation to this people only; so that we find, nothing less than a miracle could persuade him that the Deity was concerned for the happiness of all.

But

But while God was anxious for the recovery of the *lost sheep of the House of Israel*, while he was exercising every measure, consistent with the general plan of his government, to bring the posterity of Jacob to salvation, he did not overlook the rest of mankind, but like a tender and merciful father, he watched over them for good.

With peculiar pleasure he nourished every son and daughter of Adam; with infinite satisfaction he beheld their upright intentions, and their anxious endeavours after virtue and purity of nature. He saw, and loved the humble centurion, though sprung from a Heathen stock. He saw him distribute the gifts of Providence among the indigent, relieving the distressed, and administering the healing balm of comfort to the afflicted mind. He saw luxury banished from his board, and with the exulting tenderness of a parent, he received from this virtuous son the warm tribute of devotion, gratitude, and filial love. And in kindness to this worthy man, who was faithful over a few things; the Almighty was not only pleased to
manifest

manifest his approbation of his conduct in a peculiarly convincing manner, but to give him a farther knowledge of his duty as well as superior motives to the practice of it.

While he was in the exercise of fervent devotion; *he saw in a vision, evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming unto him, and saying, Cornelius, thy prayers and thine alms are come up as a memorial before God; and now send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, he shall inform thee what thou oughtest to do.* From hence then we learn what are the qualifications necessary for the reception of the gospel. In the first place, a virtuous improvement of that portion of knowledge we already enjoy. Secondly, an honest candid, and inquisitive mind, not rendered haughty by pride, or incredulous by unreasonable and foolish suspicions. And, lastly, all these good dispositions to the truth, rendered subservient to a humble, grateful, benevolent, and devout purpose. Vain is the thirst after truth, vain the highest acquisitions in knowledge, unless rendered useful by a virtu-

ous and a holy life. Cornelius was endued with all these amiable dispositions, he was humble in his deportment, charitable to the poor, pious towards God, and open to the reception of the truth : he suspected not the reality of the vision ; but with a faith, equal to that of the ancient patriarch, he believed God : and in obedience to the divine command, he sent men to Joppa. And here it is worth while to examine the characters of those messengers. One, in particular, is said to be a devout soldier, and without doubt the other two were worthy and approved men ; he very prudently did not choose to incur the imputation of enthusiasm himself, or subject the cause of God to the scoff of sinners, by entrusting men of vicious characters with this really important message. There is a propriety to be observed upon all occasions, whether as respecting the things of this life, or those of religion and the eternal world. We ought to carry with us to all companies a religious temper ; but reason will sometimes direct us not to cast pearls before swine, or like David, *to be dumb,*

to open not our mouths when the wicked are before us. Prudence will direct us when to suppress, and when, to let our zeal for the sacred cause of religion break forth into a holy flame; when to support the evidence of Christianity; when to enforce its motives, sanctions, and penalties. But to return to the subject. The servants of this devout centurion continued on their way, and found as the angel directed. But will Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, attend these messengers to the house of a Heathen? will he mingle with those who are strangers to the common wealth of Israel, or preach the gospel of the kingdom to the uncircumcised?

Yes, this great preacher of Christianity was taught, now the distinctions of the law were ceased, and God had shewed him, that he should not call any man common or unclean; directed, therefore, by the spirit, he came to the house of Cornelius; where, when he heard from this just man what great things God had done for him, he became fully persuaded that *God is not the God of the Jews only, but also of*

the Gentiles; of a truth, says he, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, the same is accepted of him. As if he had said, " misled by a national prejudice, and by partial representations of the Deity, I believed he gave his sanction to the offices of religion no where, but in the synagogues of the Jews; I believed his goodness confined, so that while he was peculiarly anxious for the salvation of the house of Jacob, he was indifferent to the happiness of the rest of mankind: but now I perceive that neither birth nor parentage, imply a reason for the distribution of his favours; and that in every nation, age, and clime, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."

In what amiable light is the great God here pourtrayed, not as the weak Heathen divinities, led on by caprice in his partial exertions of power and goodness; not like them, a local titular God of particular persons, or a particular country: but as a God, whose jurisdiction reaches over all the real universe, taking

in men, and their characters at one vast comprehensive view; distributing his bounty, not by a blind affection, or partial fondness, but with infinite justice, judgment and mercy; for *we are all his offspring*. He respects not the persons of men, but where true worth prevails; wherever truth, virtue, and unaffected piety reside, whether beneath the roofs of elegance and grandeur, or with humility beneath the shed of an obscure cottage; it is all one, the prince, or the peasant, if they are both equally virtuous, are both equally beloved; they are pleasing in his sight, and accepted with him.

From the words of the text, and this view of them we learn two things of great importance; first, with regard to a right conception of the Divine Nature and his providence; and secondly, with regard to the conduct of life.

1st. We gather from it that respect of persons, exclusive of their moral characters and dispositions, is inconsistent with the nature of

God, and contrary to the universal tenor of the divine conduct.

2d. We learn from hence the conditions of salvation, or the terms upon which we may obtain the divine acceptance and favour.

Men, as imperfect creatures, are liable to be caught by external appearances; some outward adventitious merit may hide from our view, a thousand failings and vices within; we cannot always penetrate through the veil, and disclose the villain in the secret corners of his heart. A beauteous form, fine insinuating address, often appear to our misjudging eyes, as real and valuable excellencies, while oftentimes true merit, and illustrious worth escape our notice; concealed, as it were, from our view in course moulds and vessels of earth. I do not know how to account for it, but by reducing it to the general impress of frailty, and imperfection, stamped upon a creature's mind. There is as much caprice in the exertion of our social affections as in any thing; we often like, or dislike by a kind of instinct, or the impulses of humour: though, by the way,

way, it ought to be observed, that in our closer and voluntary connections we are more deliberate, and a man in consequence, may be supposed to have some regard to the sober dictates of right reason and discernment. But when the principle is diffused so as to take in the whole community, we seldom find many traces of cool deliberation, and a discernment of characters. One is adored as a patriot, who is perhaps sapping the props of government, or sending through the land a spirit of dissipation, irreligion, and vice. Another hears the acclamations of a kingdom, hail him the hero of mankind, when reason tells us, that he little deserves the epithet. Another, perhaps, of superior merit, is branded as a coward, or dragged by the unthinking capricious multitude to the block. How vain then the praises that flow from the tongues of the giddy world! how despicable their glory, and how little to be heeded, their misjudging, or envious censures! but it is our happiness, that there is a perfect and just judge of human characters, a judge who perceives, as in open day,

day, the virtuous emotions of the upright mind, the generous sympathy of the benevolent heart, as well as the inward rancour, the lurking malice, the envenomed spite of every vicious soul, and will love or hate accordingly; a judge, that with infinite rectitude determines our moral characters, and bestows a reward, or assigns a punishment proportionable to our merits or demerits. If this then be the case, we may very justly infer, that God is no respecter of persons; I mean exclusive of their moral characters. It is true every virtuous, upright soul he respects, loves, and favours; he regards them as his friends, and will, hereafter testify his approbation of their conduct before those assembled multitudes, on the last and tremendous day of judgment, when the Judge shall say to every good and pious man, whatever tribe he belonged to, whatever air he breathed, whatever language conveyed his prayer and praise to Heaven, or whatever station he filled in life: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.

But

But this is consistent with the eternal law of rectitude and goodness; congenial, therefore, with the nature of God, and infinitely worthy the just sovereign of the world. This doctrine spreads peace and happiness through the universe; fills the good man with a rational and well-grounded confidence in the divine favour; and while it pours a bitter draught to the cup of the ungodly and the sinner; it lifts up the head of the righteous, when the waters of affliction roll over him, and bids him look up with satisfaction to the Father of spirits, the God of grace and consolation, while the gospel assures, that "there is no difference between the Greek and the Jew, but that the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him." While we are taught that God makes no difference, but what the moral characters of men make; that all mankind are saved, or rejected, not by likings, or grudges unaccountable, but are justified by the eternal law of equity and goodness; by the law of justice, but not that severe and inexorable justice, untempered with mercy: while we are
punished

punished according to our demerits, or saved by *the righteousness of God, revealed by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference*; Rom. iii. 22. while we are taught by the spirit, that of a truth God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation, *he that feareth him is accepted with him*; while this is the language of inspiration, can we dispute the truth of it, and go about to erect a standard for the divine conduct, according to our own partial and unworthy apprehensions? shall we bid him, like ourselves, be led by humour in the communications of his goodness, or indiscriminately to punish, without respect to real characters and intrinsic worth of moral agents? vain presumption! the Divine conduct, is fixed as nature. The foundations of his dispensations, are laid deep in the unalterable fitness of things; in truth, in judgment, and mercy. Earthly monarchs may act as they will, they may lift an unworthy favourite to the summit of precarious fortune, or sink the worthy man to the depths of temporal afflictions. They may confine
their

their favours to the great and opulent, however destitute of virtue, however abandoned to vice; but "their ways are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts." Obscurity, and want, hide not the worthy from the all-searching eyes of God, nor conceal the vicious and the profligate.

God cannot be imposed upon, or deceived in the several characters of the human race, but must know the good from the bad, else he is not a proper judge of the world; and if he knows the guilty and the righteous he must, as a just and holy Being, reward the one, and punish the other. Since these are truths, which the Infidel, as well as the Christian must allow, the inference then is most highly apparent. "That of a truth, God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Such is the amiable idea which the religion of Jesus, gives us of the Supreme Governor of mankind; such the delightful, just, and rational character of the Divinity; such the holy, and just terms of our salvation.

Be

Be grateful, therefore, to the Father of lights, who has given us such a view of his ways, the methods of his providence, and the rules of moral conduct; who bids us be happy here, by a life of virtue, and gives us Heaven in reversion, as the reward of our integrity.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

J O H N XIV. 2.

In my Father's house are many mansions.

REAL goodness, generous disinterested benevolence, and sincere piety, even when they are mixed with many imperfections are delightful objects of contemplation. Virtue commands admiration and respect. Integrity is sure of the warm tribute of love and applause from every honest mind. But when all the assemblage of virtues and graces that can adorn a rational being, meet in one upright mind,

mind, they form a most exalted perfect character; a character entitled to the love and reverence of every intelligent being through the universe. Such is that of our Saviour; in his life were displayed the most sincere piety and reasonable devotion, the most cheerful resignation to the will of Heaven, and a pious submission to all the disposals of Providence. His religion was sincere, but without ostentation; his benevolence and humanity mixed with the greatest tenderness, reached every object of distress, untinged by prejudice or revenge. If the haughty Scribe, or envious Pharisee, wanted his assistance, he withheld not his healing hand, and even removed their doubts and scruples, when they were proposed with an evil design. Humility marked his footsteps, and meekness and candour were stamped upon every action. Thus in every respect, his conduct is a pattern for all believers, and his life the standard of right piety towards God, and benevolence to men. We are therefore to learn of him the true estimate of life; and as he has taught us, so we believe that he is the

the way, the truth and the life. He has unveiled the secrets of eternity, to the eyes of faith; and taught us, on what conditions we are to insure to ourselves, the privileges of immortality. His sentiments on this head are highly reasonable, and if we consider the nature of God, examine all the attributes of Divinity, we cannot dispute the truth of what he asserts. While justice sits sovereign on the throne of God, and goodness and mercy soften its rigour; and while consummate knowledge and unerring wisdom single out objects of punishment or reward, who can doubt that all mankind shall be dealt with according to their respective characters. Divine Goodness will bestow upon every individual, as great a portion of happiness as he is capable of enjoying. *In my Father's house are many mansions*; gradations of felicity; various measures of enjoyment. It is, however, to be observed, that every member of that sacred and blessed community is to be happy; but still in a just proportion to his progress in faith and holiness. If it were not so, I would have been sincere
and

and honest with you, I would have told you, and not have amused you with splendid hopes, and gay delusions; with grand expectations, which a few years would convince you how ill they were grounded.

What tenderness, inexpressible tenderness, of love and friendship, has our Saviour manifested to the human race in this memorial that he has left behind him for comfort and support amidst the troubles and anxieties of life, to raise our drooping courage, and kindle the dying sparks of virtue and religion, and to engage us to stand our ground against the assaults of temptations?

Though these words were immediately directed to the apostles, in order to inspire them with a stronger love of truth, and to preserve their integrity amidst the storms of persecution, and the unexpected conflict they were to undergo, by the death of their master, yet it was calculated for the good of futurity; the benefit of Christians in all ages of the world. It contains matter of excellent instruction, and is a proof of the purity and reasonableness

reasonableness of the Christian religion. Be not troubled at the prospect that is now before you, but arm yourselves with constancy and resolution; for Heaven, who perceives the actions of the good, and applauds their virtue; will reward them hereafter; for they shall enjoy as much real happiness as their natures are capable of receiving; and the best men shall be the happiest men.

In discoursing farther from these words, I shall explain more at large what our Saviour meant, by the expression. "In my Father's house are many mansions."

It is not certain that the disciples understood what their master would signify by his *Father's house*, though they might have considered that he always called God his father, and consequently that he had heaven in view, or a place of future and everlasting happiness: but be that as it will, it is certain, that he speaks of the blessed state, to which we are all hoping to be admitted. "In my Father's house are many mansions," is thus highly

expressive of those degrees of enjoyment, those gradations of real felicity and honour, which virtuous souls, according to their proportions of holiness, their different progress in real religion will partake of; and this in allusion to the different apartments assigned in the palaces of kings, to those of different orders and employments. The text will, therefore, bear the following paraphrase. "Ye have hitherto amused yourselves with high hopes of temporal happiness; ye imagined yourselves in the retinue of a monarch, and saw yourselves in fancy, raised to the highest places in his kingdom; but now every appearance of worldly honour, wealth, and power, is vanished; and instead of these, persecution, poverty, and contempt, seem to await you; arm yourselves, therefore, with courage and resolution, prove yourselves the warm and steady advocates of truth and goodness; for if you do thus, great will be your reward; the recompence, of your virtue shall exceed your most sanguine expectations; for in my father's house

house are many mansions, in that seat of blifs and glory to which I am soon to remove from you, are a variety of pleasures suited to the dispositions of my followers; various degrees of glory and happiness, where every one shall be exalted according to his real worth, his advances in piety and virtue, his improvement in truth, and moral perfections. Strive, therefore, to render yourselves worthy of the highest places in the kingdom of God; be not satisfied with low degrees of goodness, but despise every gratification of animal nature, when it interferes with your duty, or renders you indifferent to the things of God: for I assure you again, that they who sow plentifully shall reap plentifully; and those that sow sparingly, shall reap also sparingly. Wisdom, and justice have so ordered it. And shall the infinite Being recede from his promise, or alter the measures of his government?"

I now proceed to examine the evidence, from reason and scripture, for the truth of my text. And first, we draw an undisputable

argument from the justice of God, that mankind shall receive according to their works. What shall we say of the haughty sons of disobedience? will Heaven reward their infidelity, approve of their acts of extortion, injustice, and cruelty, or smile on their impiety, and contempt of God? rather vengeance will be hurled on their guilty heads, and justice will overtake them in their career of vice. But in punishment, God has an inviolable respect to equity, and in punishing, he is infinitely just; without partiality or cruelty. There is a certain degree of punishment for every instance of disobedience and sin; for as every vice is different, with regard to its nature and extent, so the punishment entailed upon it must be also different: *covetousness* is a sin, *extortion* is a greater. An indifference, with regard to the things of God, is manifestly wrong, and has certainly its punishment; but a total irreligion, is a higher degree of depravity and corruption. Malice and envy are both violations of the law of God, but murder,

murder, is by far more destructive; and the last stage of degeneracy and injustice: so that upon the whole, we infer, that if there are degrees in sin, and various stages of iniquity; the punishment hereafter, will be proportioned to the demerit of the action, that is, will be every way adequate to the crime. Thus then covetousness will be punished, but not surely in the same degree, as extortion, or injustice, nor malevolence, feel the hand of justice equally severe with black revenge, inhumanity, and murder.

And thus we gather, by a parity of reason, that different degrees of virtue and holiness, shall enjoy different degrees of happiness and glory. It is certain that some have made a greater and more illustrious acquisition in the virtues of the Christian temper, than others in the same circumstances, and with the same advantages and privileges. Some are more indolent and careless about these important matters than others. And, does not justice, as well as wisdom, require that industry should be distinguished;

tinguished; and diligent, watchful virtue more highly rewarded, than he that is slothful and indifferent in the works of piety and goodness. He that relieves distress, when it comes in his way, is an object worthy of praise and esteem; but he excites a much higher degree of admiration and love, who seeks opportunities of doing good; finds out the wretched in the house of pain, and relieves the unhappy. And this disinterested, benevolent disposition; this amiable tenderness and humanity, lays a foundation for superior, and more exalted degrees of happiness. Greater is his virtue, who bears the burden and heat of the day; who perseveres in his integrity, amongst the severest trials, and bravely quits the pleasures of life; resigns honour, wealth, and ease, and submits to persecution, poverty, and contempt, while adhering to the cause of truth, and the dictates of conscience, than his who has none of these trials to struggle with, none of these temptations to put his virtue in disgrace.

But we must observe, that though we perceive different degrees of goodness in moral beings,

beings, though in some, we behold piety and benevolence; a cheerful resignation to the will of Heaven, and an enlarged diffusive goodwill to man, shine with a noble lustre; while these amiable virtues, these divine qualities seem faint and languid in others; yet we are not to make such an enormous distinction between them in a future state, as Heaven and hell: this is passing all bounds of reason and propriety. We should rather, agreeable to the declaration of the gospel, say, that they both shall be happy, though in different degrees. He whose pound gained ten pounds, was made a ruler over ten cities; and he whose pound gained five pounds, was made to have authority over five cities. Behold, then, the justice of God, in assigning every one his portion according to his desert; while he that had made no improvement forfeited even that which he had!

His eye perceives even the nicest distinctions in the qualities and dispositions of his accountable creatures, and his hand will as

nicely dispose of their future conditions. He is emphatically represented as weighing us in the balance, in the unerring scale of infinite justice; his decisions are all equitable, and no one shall ever have any reason to complain of severity or partiality. How happy then, must we be, in being accountable to a Being of the strictest justice, and most perfect goodness; to be punished or rewarded by him who never can be influenced by any private interest, malice, or revenge, and how favourable this declaration of our Saviour is to the cause of virtue; how well calculated to inspire us with a noble ardour, to excel in every instance of universal righteousness; I will leave every reasonable being to determine. When he considers, that upon this scheme there is no point to limit our happiness, no boundary to circumscribe the felicity of virtuous minds; but that it must still increase, as we increase in those sentiments, dispositions, and actions, which are the settled conditions, on which we are to obtain an admission into these mansions of bliss.

Here

Here reason and interest plead in behalf of virtue and religion, though too often silenced by the hurry of the world. Far, from giving sanction to vice or justify a partial obedience, they condemn every regular step, or even indifference to good things. Let us, therefore, endeavour to excel in every thing that is virtuous and praise-worthy, and by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality. It is a noble and laudable ambition to aim at being foremost in the list of good men. Whatever acquisitions we may make in other things, a few years will render useless; but real goodness is an acquisition that will never fail, nor disappoint its owner; this will brighten up the clouded prospect of futurity, and prove a perpetual feast of happiness and glory. You have heard that the reward of the righteous, in a future state, shall be proportioned to the degrees of their improvement in this. If they have sown bountifully, they shall also reap bountifully; if with greater zeal they have applied themselves to the study of the divine perfections

fections and works, they shall then be admitted to a more intimate knowledge and communion with God. And, if having well improved their religious advantages to the important purposes of an holy life; they have been careful to adorn their nature, with every useful accomplishment, they shall then also be proportionably more happy in their own reflections. Not one good action they perform, not a sincere attempt to promote the honour of God, or the good of men, shall any ways lose its reward. But the same dispositions and affections, the same habits and desires, which they contracted in this life, shall attend them to the other world, where God, who loveth goodness, will reward every instance of improvement in it, with proportionably higher expressions of his favour through eternal ages. According to the apostle, the saints at the resurrection, shall be advanced to as many degrees of perfection and happiness, as there are stars in the firmament of Heaven, which differ from one another in glory. There is one glory
of

of the sun, says he, another glory of the moon, another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead. Oh! what an admirable tendency hath this to beget in us an ardent love to God, a sincere affection to Jesus Christ, and universal benevolence to the whole human race, as being necessary to qualify us for mansions of glory, and exalted degrees of happiness, where we shall be above the want of pity, above the reach of pain. As, therefore, we hope for admittance into the kingdom of God at last; let us now obey his commands, let us give our attendance on the solemn exercises of religion. Let us bring into the temple of God, hearts prepared to receive the truth in the love of it; and above all, study to practice according to the directions given us, and shew in our lives; that we have not received the grace of God in vain; but grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let the peace of God rule in our heart.

And

And may all sacramental institutions, be duly and properly observed by us, and have their deserved influence over our hearts and lives.

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to receive the word in the love of it; and
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the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,
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SERMON
every one that has not received the grace
of the Christian giving us, and then in our

A

FUNERAL SERMON.

P S A L M S XXXIX. 4.

Lord make me know mine end, and the measure of
my days, what it is; that I may know how frail
I am.

IT is worthy of a reasonable being to reflect
on the infirmity of his nature; and with
the royal prophet to put up to the author of
his life, the serious and useful petition in the
text; *Lord make me know mine end, and the
measure of my days, what it is; that I may know
how*

how frail I am. But mortality is a theme, that but few choose to dwell upon. The vicious with horror and confusion anticipate this gloomy hour; and even the virtuous shrink at the approach of death, and dread the untried gulph. But how unreasonable is it to shut our ears against the calls of nature, and hurry away our lives in a pleasing, but dangerous delusion? Every circumstance about us proves us mortal, and with silent eloquence, points to that solemn hour; when nature, burdened with pain and disease, shall struggle in the arms of death; and with reluctance, break from an earthly prison, to explore the hidden mysteries of the invisible world.

How frail is human nature! how few the days of man! and with what variety of misfortunes, and afflictions, are those few chequered! from the cradle to the grave, in continual apprehensions of death; and for ever subject to some disquietudes, that embitter his enjoyments; liable to a thousand unseen accidents that may easily cut the thread of life,
and

S E R M O N X V .

and unhinge the slender props of animal
existence.

But is this the severe command of a capricious being? Is it an unreasonable task assigned us by a merciless tyrant, without any design but to gratify a cruel disposition; or rather the wise appointment of a kind, benevolent and tender parent; are they not the appointments of that Supreme Being, whose providence controlleth all events in nature; are they not manifestly tending to produce the best effects, by advancing the perfection and felicity of reasonable beings; and to convey infinitely greater blessings to the world than long life, an uninterrupted succession of health, peace, and plenty? The one inclines us to think seriously, for what purposes we were made; what great end the Almighty had in view; what is the business of our lives, and in what manner we ought to spend our few and uncertain days; it tends to wean our affections from an immoderate solicitude after the perishing enjoyments and fleeting vanities
of

S E R M O N XV.

of this world, and to give them a direction towards, and fix them upon the great realities of a future and everlasting life. While a series of prosperous days tend to soften and relax our virtuous purposes; to enfeeble our best endeavours after purity and holiness, and to give too high a relish for the pleasures of this life, to wish for any better beyond the grave. It follows then, that it is very useful, frequently to contemplate on the short duration and uncertainty of our present existence, and the precariousness of every earthly enjoyment; for in the midst of the highest health and prosperity, we are liable to the most sudden transitions, to the most gloomy and uncomfortable circumstances, and sickness may unexpectedly incapacitate us for the pleasures and enjoyments of animal nature; and death may arrest us in full pursuit of pleasure; when our hearts are gay, and our eyes sparkling with mirth; for what is the life of man? It is very justly compared by an ancient venerable sage, to a vapour, that appeareth for a while
and

*and vanisheth away; or, to the flower of the field, that now unfolds its beauties to the rising sun; and lavish of its treasure, fills the air with its fragrant perfume, when, anon, the levelling scythe cuts it off in the bloom of vegetable life; or, the unfriendly cold, blasts the tender plant; the vigorous juice no longer circulates life, and lo! it withers and dies! What an apt similitude this to human life! how expressive of the various disasters to which we are liable in every stage of it! to how many deaths are we liable, before we reach the bloom of youth! what variety of disorders may tear off the union between soul and body! and how very few reach the destined period of *threescore years and ten*! Some linger out their lives in pain and anxiety, and see death approach with a slow, but a steady pace; while others are swept off, as it were, in a moment, when the solemn hour seemed afar off. How proper, how useful then is the sentiment in the text? how reasonable and just to think of death, and to make a just provision for it; since we all must die, and*

enter an unknown state, where our conditions will be determined according to our merit. What can be more reasonable than to make all proper provision for it, and be always in readiness whenever Infinite Wisdom shall think fit to call? And to this end, we must first have a just sense of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and its best accommodations; and frequently with the holy Psalmist, in the text, say, "Lord make me know mine end," &c. let me be always sensible of the frailty and mortality of my nature; let me be ever conscious, that there is but a thin partition between this life and another; but an uncertain breath that divides the sensible from the invisible world; and that when a few sands are run, I must pay the tax laid on humanity, and bid an eternal adieu to all the enjoyments of life.

The advantages that would necessarily arise from a just sense of the infirmity of our nature; and from frequent and serious considerations of our mortality are various, and of the highest importance;

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The advantages that would necessarily arise from a just sense of the infirmity of our nature; and from frequent and serious considerations of our mortality are various, and of the highest importance;

importance: for, in the first place, when we are ever sensible, that our lives are short and uncertain; and that the advantages and pleasures attending a course of sin, are at best but short lived and precarious; we must necessarily be influenced to make some provision for that world, to which we are all hastening. When beset with a temptation of any kind; the thought that he can enjoy the benefits arising from it (if there be any) but a very short time, and that soon he must pay dear for the follies and irregularities of this life, would take off the edge of passion, and prove a most effectual restraint against the allurements of sin.

I would not be thought to inculcate such an unreasonable piece of severity, as to bring in the picture of death, to damp all the innocent enjoyments and recreations of life. This, instead of inspiring us with cheerful piety, and rational devotion, would beget in us a gloomy, superstitious habit of mind. The design of our Maker, in the formation of reasonable beings, plainly discountenances it; he bids us

enjoy life in peace and comfort; and it was the end of our Saviour's coming into the world to deliver those, who, through a servile fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage. The Almighty blessed us with a kind of inattention to our latter end; he has planted round us such a variety of pleasing objects, as make us, in some measure, insensible of our mortality, but at the same time he takes abundant care, to let us know we are mortal, and to assure the living that they must die. Those symptoms of death that we feel in our own constitutions, and the departure of friends and acquaintance, are frequent momentos of our own end, and conspire to give us such a serious turn of mind, as to preserve us from a dissipation and levity of heart; a forgetfulness of the great end of our being, and a foolish inattention to the duties of life, and the directions of reason and conscience. So that from hence we may gather, that it is our Maker's will, that we should so often contemplate the frailty and shortness of this life, as to turn our hearts to wisdom and goodness:

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goodness: and make our conduct steady and uniform: for a consistent life, and steadiness in virtue alone, can strip death of its terror, and turn its gloomy passage to a shining path; a passage to life, light, and glory. This is the great design of our Creator to make us capable of happiness in all the changing scenes of life; and even to make us easy under the immediate apprehensions of death. But how is this happiness to be attained, and how can nature bear the shocking thought of a dissolution? vice can prove but a weak friend, nor can its most transporting joys give ease, or so much as prove a balance against the fluctuating uncertainties of the present existence; how much less guard against the terrors of the evil day; for the vicious must look back on their former courses with confusion, and before them with terror: how can he bear the dreadful thought of quitting his dear enjoyments, and without any preparation for it, enter an unknown world. "When the hour of death approaches, if they are capable of reflection, they must feel and own, that

that all their pursuits have been vanity; that they ought to have secured some noble enjoyments; and that a life to be spent over again in the same insignificant and trifling manner, would be an object unworthy of a single wish:" if these will be our sentiments at the conclusion of life; it cannot surely be improper to inculcate them upon those, who may apprehend such a period at the greatest distance. It cannot be unreasonable to put up the petition in the text. Death visits us in every shape. Death sweeps away the young, the old, the strong, and the weak: it is a matter then, of universal concern; in every stage of life we are liable to be cut off; in the vigour and strength of youth, as well as in feeble age. "The earliest part of life cannot be too early to anticipate the sentiments, that we shall form at its close; when we shall certainly see things in a much juster light than we do at present. Can we be wise too soon? What a pity it is, that we should spend half a life, in a manner that will yield us no satisfaction in death! what a folly to spend any
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part of our time in such a course as will heighten our distress in the solemn, trying hour!" What madness to be inattentive to the means of our happiness, and to put off from one's view, that important time, when soul and body shall be rent asunder, and we shall be summoned before the awful tribunal of a just Divinity. Then, O! my soul, do thou frequently look forward, and anticipate that hour, when all the pleasures and enjoyments of sense, will be incapable of affording one beam of comfort. Behold the silent tomb awaits thee, ready to inclose that vehicle in which thou art now acting thy probation! ready to swallow the last remains of pride and insolence! While opportunity offers, let us avail ourselves of every moment. Let us conduct ourselves in such a manner, that death may be a triumphant entry into those regions of joy where undissembled virtue will meet a noble reward.

Our friends, relations, and acquaintance are daily moving their places of abode, continually shifting the scenes of existence. Each day pre-

leaves some fresh memorials of our frailty and mortality.

He who lately assisted in our public devotions at this place, and joined us in prayer and praise to the Supreme Being, is now no more to us. Death has drawn up his black veil, and interrupted all communications between him and us. That tongue that lately joined in solemn thanksgiving, is now become useless. Death has stiffened those limbs, that a few days ago were active in the concerns of life. The powers of animal nature are now ceased, have performed their last functions, and the disembodied soul, where Heaven has judged fit, waiting the great and awful event of the judgment day, when the graves shall resign their charge of ages; a period of universal concern! when all mankind shall be assembled in one vast multitude to receive an eternal doom, according to their works.

To us it may appear that if God had, for a longer while, kept in life, one that we were intimately connected with, it might be better on several accounts. The death of a tender parent;

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parent, a parent, with whose life, hopes, and welfare of a widowed wife and numerous children were so closely, and tenderly joined, is a mournful thought! it is a theme, that humanity cannot dwell upon but with reluctance, and a tender sympathising concern. But how little do we know of the ways of God! how confined are our views of the great, universal Creator! Providence may by this, be planning their happiness, and future salvation; that God, who knows what is best, does always what is right; and it is our duty to endeavour to be satisfied with his ways. But nature will have its way; grief is too closely connected with real affection, not to pay the last tribute of sorrow to the memory of a dear friend, or a kind, tender, and an endearing relation. And indeed, moderate grief, and the moderate tears of affection are due to departed friends: but we should by no means sorrow, as if we had no hopes of meeting them again, in more happy and gladsome regions. Christianity soothes us with the pleasing thought, that when this life is over, we shall meet again in hap-

pleaseth, never to feel the grief of parting
 more.
 While death, then, is making such havock
 amongst us, let us prepare to admit the fatal
 shaft: for only the Great Disposer of all events
 knows when it shall be our turn. When the
 sun and moon shall withdraw their light from
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